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**LIFE AND WORKS OF  
VAZHAKUNNAM VASUDEVAN NAMBUDIRI**  
*(A book based on the doctoral thesis)*

**Dr. C. Sreekumaran**

**English**

**LIFE AND WORKS OF  
VAZHAKUNNAM VASUDEVAN NAMBUDIRI**

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**Dr. C. Sreekumaran**

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**Publishers:**

**Arshaprakasam Prasiddheekarana Samithi,  
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## About the Author

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*Father: C. Krishnan Nambudiri, Retd. H.M., G.H.S. and Sanskrit investigator.*

*Mother: Umadevi Antarjanam (Native house: Kudumbakkattu Mana).*

*Wife : Mini (Native House : Puthur Muthumanana)*

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The very formation of Arshaprakasam Prasiddheekarana Samithi was to explore into the vaguely known realms of Indian Culture and tradition and to bring to light atleast a few distinguished gems.

Thus the first ray of Arshaprakasam was 'Bharatheeya Sasthra Cinta. Book-I Mathematics', a collection of mathematical thoughts in Sanskrit literature (380 pages, Malayalam, Rs 200) of Sri C. Krishna Nambudiri, research investigator in Sanskrit, Calicut University. The book was released by Dr. Murali Manohar Joshi, Hon'ble Union minister for H.R.D. Science and Technology giving a copy to Sri K.P.S. Menon (Jr) at Thiruvananthapuram on 28-8-98.

It was on 15th August last year that we presented our first publication. Now on this independence day, it is again with pride and pleasure that we project the second ray of Arshaprakasam- 'Life and Works of Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri' of Dr. C. Sreekumaran.

We solicit warm welcome and co-operation of the readers again.

Calicut,  
15-8-'99.

T.V. Divakaran,  
Joint Secretary,  
Arshaprakasam-  
Prasiddheekarana Samithi.



*Dedicated to my grandfather late  
Sri C. Vasudevan Nambudiri  
(1889-1945), Vedic scholar and  
author of "Chekrahkal Kritikal",  
a book of Malayalam poems.*

*- Author*

## *Message*

*Sri Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Namboodiri was an erudite Vedic Scholar, well reputed interpreter, propagator and exponent of the Bhagavata. Many of the Bhagavata interpreters of the present generation are either the direct disciples of Sri. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Namboodiri, or those who got inspired by his life and teaching.*

*Born in a poor Brahmin family rich in its Vedic and ritualistic tradition Sri Vazhakunnam had his education under great scholars in the gurukula system of learning. Apart from a Bhagavata interpreter Sri Vazhakunnam was the author of many books both in Sanskrit and Malayalam. He was also a poet, dramatist and commentator of Srimadbhagavatam. Hence a study about his life, works and contribution to Sanskrit literature will add to the rich tradition of Kerala in the field of Sanskrit study.*

*As a result of his enduring work Dr. C. Sreekumaran was Successful in bringing out a very good study on the life and works of Sri Vazhakunnam. In his attempt to conduct the study Sri Sreekumaran met many individuals related to Sri Vazhakunnam, Collected his works both in print and manuscript form and conducted interviews. This work, no doubt*

*will throw light on the glowing life history of Sri. Vazhakunnam. Sri Sreekumaran can be proud of presenting such a work before the lovers of Sanskrit literature and tradition of our country.*

*C.U.Campus,  
Thenhipalam.*

*Dr. T.K. Narayanan,  
Professor in Sanskrit,  
University of Calicut.*

## *Message*

*The Divine Minstrel Narada once approached his father Brahma to be instructed in the path of devotion. After narrating the various sportive manifestations of Vishnu, Brahma spake: This is the quintessence of the Bhagavata that the Lord imparted to me. You preach it in such a way that men will be endowed with devotion to the supreme Lord. Practice and propagation of the path of Bhakti, Narada made his life's mission. He wrote a treatise on Bhakti; produced Prahlada a paragon of devotion as an embodiment of his definition of Devotion in his apphorisms. Made the wounded prince Dhruva the pole-star. Inspired Valmiki and Vyasa to write their immortal works, the Ramayana and the Bhagavata. Inspired innumerable souls in the path of devotion to God.*

*In the recent past we have had a few worthy followers of the celestial sage. Guruvayur is an ancient place of pilgrimage. In recent times it has shot into prominence and is attracting pilgrims from outside Kerala as well. A religious revival is taking place with Guruvayur as the centre. This devotional renaissance we owe to a number of dedicated souls. The first and foremost among them is Melpathur Narayana Bhatathiri who summarised the Bhagavata into the incomparable devotional poem, the Narayaneeyam. Puntanam, his contemporary, through his mellifluous poems in Malayalam has contributed a good deal to the attraction to the Lord of Guruvayur. Then came Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nampoothiri. He was a gifted poet, accomplished expounder of the Bhagavata and the reli-*

gious lore. His audience used to be carried away by his inspired devotional oration. Though he moved about in various parts of Kerala and outside, Guruvayur is his central place and Guruvayurappan, the Supreme Lord of his heart. He has written many books both in Sanskrit and Malayalam in poem and prose. All his writings are superb devotional treatises. He has inspired a number of gifted young men to carry on the Bhagavata tradition. Like the celestial Sage he has left behind a number of devotional treatises and a large band of bards to carry on the Guruvayur tradition of Bhagavata exposition and preaching. In spite of his considerable contribution in this line, the present day generation knows very little of his great contribution. It is a pity. The Kerala people owe it to Vazhakunnam and to themselves to propagate his works and name.

Sri C. Sreekumaran has come forward to write a doctoral thesis on the Life and Contribution of the reputed mount h - peace of Guruvayurappan. He has given a short biography of the Bhagavata and has given a complete list of his works with critical appreciation. This signal service of Sri Sreekumaran will serve as a revival of the memory and contribution of the saintly soul. If the Guruvayur Devaswom follows this up by printing the complete works of Sri Vazhakunnam they will be doing a signal service to Guruvayurappan and His devotees.

Sri Sreekumaran deserves the thanks and gratitude of all devotees of the Lord of Guruvayur.

**Swami Siddhinathananda**

Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama,  
Kozhikode.

## *Message*

### *Mysterious Indeed is Thy Grace*

Away back to sixty five years the memory flies. In a *Vysakha* (April-May) morning two sisters were doing *Pradakshina* (moving around the presiding Deity) in the temple at Guruvayur. Of these, the elder one held in her arms a babe less than a year old. At that time there came for worship a middle-aged Brahmana, shining with the beatitude of spiritual sadhana, with his wet loin-cloth, after taking bath at the place normally used by the head priest. When he reached near, the two ladies moved to a side to give him way. Hardly had he stepped forward when the babe stretched its tiny hand to pluck at the wet bath towel hanging on the Brahmin's shoulder. But, before the babe could take hold of it, the mother swiftly turned back. Hence the towel did not fall on the ground.

It was customary in those days that the Brahmana should bathe again and get him self cleansed if he was touched by a non- Brahmin. Thinking about all this, the two sisters stood perplexed with no power either to apologize or to utter a word even.

Just for a moment that noble Brahmana turned his face to the babe and smiled. That smile, replete with affection, had a soothing effect. Putting the towel back again on his shoulder he walked steadily concentrating on his Japa, not back to the tank for bathing, but towards the eastern entrance and, after entering inside, prostrated before Sree Guruvayaurappan, got him self seated on the Mandapa and continued his japa.

*The mother and her sister were at first very much agrieved at the thought that it was on account of their carelessness that the babe, born as a result of the austerities for about twelve years, though innocent, did the forbidden act . But, after the incident, when the Brahmana assumed his seat on the Mandapa, as though nothing had happened, and became absorbed in his Japa and Sadhana, there flashed at once an inspired thought in their minds. The caste and the pride arising from it and the imagination of being high and low do not at all belong to the Lord, nor are they in the mind of a true Bhaktha.*

*There is a splendid expression of the great poet in 'Kilikkonchal' which unfolds itself as given under:*

*“The Palms of Rani of Videha became a  
lotus bud at hearing the word Valmiki”*

*Similarly, even today, there is a word that makes the palms of all the devotees of Sree Guruvayurappan assume the shape of the lotus buds, and that is 'Bhakthasiromani' Brhamasree Vazhakkunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri who lived for fifty-five years and laid his soul at the lotus feet of Sree Guruvayurappan fifty-three years back. He was the embodiment of the inspired thought that Bhagavatha, Bhagavan and Bhaktha are one in essence. It is not known whether there is any disciple of his still living. But there are even to-day a few speakers who drew inspiration from his disciples and who are very active in the field in enlightening the Bhakthas and in maintaining the tradition deservedly. And Bhagavatha Vachaspathi Thottam Krishnan Nambudiri is an illustrious example.*

*This was the prayer often uttered by Bhakthasiromani to Sree Guruvayurappan:*

*“With folded arms I beg of you again , Oh lotus-eyed Lord, that you may be pleased to protect me in such a way as to give me no occasion to bow to others”. And to the other gods and goddesses his prayer was that he might be in a position to serve Hari to the last breath. The Lord accepted both these prayers, as is evidenced by his sublime life.*

*He was not only an ardent devotee of the Lord and an orator who could take the audience by storm, but he was also proficient in the study of the Vedas and the texts of Vedanta. Besides, he was a poet and an artist. Melputhur Narayana Bhattachari gave an offering of a “bunch of thousand 'fairest flowers' of pure Sanskrit verses” to Sree Guruvayurappan and Poonthanam, in praise of the Lord, wrote many poems which are sweet honey to the devotees of the Lord. But how to describe the oblation in the form of Kavya offered by Vazhakkunnam ? The warmth of the heart, the purity of the soul and the sweetness of devotion - all these find a happy blending in his poems , as in the fresh warm cow's milk that mother Yesoda Devi pours into the beautiful golden bowl held by both hands of her darling child, unfolding on his lotus-like face the bewitching smile whose splendour continue to flow profusely, even at this distance of time, acting as the soothing rays of the moon on the hearts of the devotees.*

*Now a young man has obtained the Doctorate for having made a penetrating study of research in the sublime life of Bhakthasiramani Vazhakkunnam which was firmly rooted in undivided devotion, focusing mainly on the tireless efforts he had made in popularizing the Bhagavatha Dharma and on the Sanskrit and Malayalam poems he had composed, revealing*

*his national outlook and perceptions about righteousness. Some years back a Brahmin lady living beyond the borders of Kerala, Sreemathy Prema Panduranga, did reserach in Narayaneeyam and obtained Doctorate and she has earned world-wide reputation. The young Brahmin of Kerala who did reserach now in the life and events of Bhakthasiromani richly merits the incessant blessings of the Lord.*

*It goes without saying that unless the Lord had showered His grace on him, no such thought of doing a research of this kind would have ever flashed in his mind. This thesis is not a product of mere knowledge, but the outcome of the consolidated effect of the grace of the Lord which the great Melputhur Bhattapadar had so aptly expressed in such word as "Mysterious indeed is thy grace", nay Sri C. Sreekumaran can proudly claim that, like the garland of Manjula, this is an offering too, to 'Unnikannan.'*

*Is it not in this manner itself that this humble self too should think? It is indeed the mysterious grace of the Lord that the very hand that touched, as a babe, the bath towel which hanged on the shoulder of Bhakthasiromani could, this day, weave in a silly thread to the silky shawl woven by Sri Sreekumaran for our Kannanunni.*

*Mathrubhumi,  
Kochi.*

*C. Uthama Kurup,  
Associate Editor.*

## INTRODUCTION

Sri Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Namboodiri , who deserves to be more widely known, is one of the pioneers of the Bhagavatha Movement that started in Kerala in the early decades of this century. Vazhakunnam lived the pious life of a true devotee of God. He made the Propagation of Krishna Bhakthi, the supreme mission of his life. His favourite deity was Guruvayoorappan. Through his speeches and exposition of the Bhagavatha, he made many realise the sweetness and the ineffable joy of the selfless love of Lord Krishna. I have had the privilege of listening to him twice in my school days. Vazhakunnam's persuasive eloquence compelling attention moved the listeners to tears, converted the sceptics and consoled the distressed.

That Vazhakunnam was a gifted poet is not known to many. He has written poems both in Malayalam and Sanskrit. His theme is always devotional . Even in his hymns addressed to other deities his fervent prayer is that he should be enabled to live unmolested in his love of the divine flute player of Vrindavan. Bhakthi is one of the main domains of poetry. In his Bhakthi Sutras, Narade defines Bhakthi "It is a feeling of the deepest love towards some one". The Sandilya Sutras say "It is supreme attachment to god". Poetry dealing with such a sentiment can not but be lyrical. Vazhakunnam's vast erudition has not in the least affected adversely his mellifluous diction and the lyrical loveliness of his poems which remind us of Mukunda Mala and Sreekrishnakarnamritham. Vazhakunnam is in the illustrious company of Kulasekhara and Leelsuka.

My young friend Dr. Sreekumaran's treatise is an excellent introduction to the life and works of this great soul. With untiring

and admirable industry and zest Sri C. Sreekumaran has managed to collect all the significant details regarding Vazhakunnam who has now grown into a legendary figure. He has gone through all his poems, published and unpublished and here he has attempted a critically appreciative evaluation of all of them emphasizing aspects which deserve greater attention. This is Dr. Sreekumaran's first literary work and I am sure that many more of its kind, each excelling its predecessor will come in due course from his pen.

"Sandhya",

**Prof. R. Ramachandran**

Calicut.

## PREFACE

Sri Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri (1891-1946) is very widely known in Kerala and fairly well known throughout India mainly as a dedicated exponent of Srimadbhagavatam. He has been recognised as Bhaktasiromani. He made substantial contribution to the devotional literature in Sanskrit as well as Malayalam. Those who lived with him in his close circle, realised that he was in addition a vedic scholar, dramatist and commentator of the Bhagavatapurana. But he was actually far more than all these. He could influence the minds of the mass to cause a wide religious reformation. His enlightening public discourses arranged at various centres in different parts of India resulted in the awakening of patriotism and cultural unity, the factors leading to national integration. In short, to an investigator's eye, he looks really like a multifaceted gem glittering from every face. Having realised the need to highlight the less known aspects of this magnificent personality before the people at large and to introduce him to the academic array, for my Ph.D research, I decided to evaluate systematically in true colours the various facets of his life and so also his works with special reference to Sanskrit literature. During the days of my boyhood which I spent at Chekrakkal Illam, my native house, along with my parents and only sister Meera, I had the good fortune to hear and get by heart some of the devotional poems, (which I later identified as that of Vazhakunnam) recited by my late grandmother Smt Parvati Antarjanam during her evening prayers. Again incidentally during the preparation of my M.Phil dissertation on the contribution of Ottur Unni Nambudiripad to Sanskrit literature, I had come across certain highly inspiring comments of Ottur himself on Vazhakunnam. This

enhanced my confidence in taking up the topic 'Life and works of Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri' for my research which entitled me for the award of Ph.D. (Sanskrit) degree in 1997. And this caption is unaltered for the book form of the revised doctoral thesis. I am highly thankful to T.T. Devasthanams, Tirupati for their kind financial assistance extended to me for the publication of this book.

I express my deep gratitude to Dr. T.K. Narayanan, professor in Sanskrit, Calicut University for having given me valuable guidance for the successful completion of this research and for having given a noteworthy message for the book. I pay homage to His Holiness Swami Siddhinathananda, Ramkrishna Mission Sevashrama, Kozhikode, an authority in Bhagavata whose blessings precipitated as a scholarly message. He mentions gracefully that the biography of Vazhakunnam written by me has become a biography of Bhagavata in the sense that Bhagavan, Bhakta and Bhagavata are identical. I am grateful to Sri C. Uthama Kurup, Associate Editor, Mathrubhumi who imparted to me a highly touching autobiographical message in which he benevolently remarks that this study on Bhaktasiromani Vazhakunnam has become a silky shawl to Kannanunni. I am indebted to Prof. R. Ramachandran, a prominent Malayalam poet and a master of many languages who introduced this book whole heartedly to the literary world. I convey my sincere thanks to Sri A.V. Vasudevan Potti, a retd. English professor and a scholar in Puranic lore, who took pains to go through the work and to suggest necessary improvements in the language prior to its publication.

The first and foremost of my beneficiaries in this research is none other than Sri Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad, the popular Bhagavata orator and direct disciple of Vazhakunnam, Who had

voluntarily lent me the lion's share of his guru's works along with his own diary containing many rare informations and invaluable experiences. I am sorry that I cannot thank him personally now as he is no more to witness the launching of this publication.

Sri O. Narayanan Nambudiri and Dr. O.S. Krishnan Nambudiri of Othalur Mana, son and grandson of Vazhakunnam respectively deserve special mention for their clemency in providing many important facts about him and in supplying his unpublished manuscripts. I respectfully remember Sri Parakkottu Valiya Vasudevan Nambudiri, an elderly Bhagavata scholar who disclosed certain impressive reminiscences that featured Vazhakunnam. Thanks to Smt Edoli Madhavi Antarjanam for making available many relevant periodicals. I cannot but mention my father Sri C. Krishnan Nambudiri, himself a Sanskrit investigator experienced with the flavour of Vazhakunnam's oratory, for his constant encouragement and all sorts of help in this endeavour.

I thank the Calicut University authorities for permitting the publication of this thesis. Thanks are also due to the authorities of the General and Sanskrit department library of Calicut University, Desaposhini library, Calicut and Sreekrishnapuram V.T. Bhattathiripad College library, Palakkad dist., for providing me with reference facilities. I thank Arshaprakasam, Calicut -1 for taking up the publication of this work.

Let this literary lamp be my humble offering to that great soul on this auspicious day, the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 1999 on which falls his 108<sup>th</sup> birthday, that too coming in this century (and millennium) itself, in which Vazhakunnam flourished.

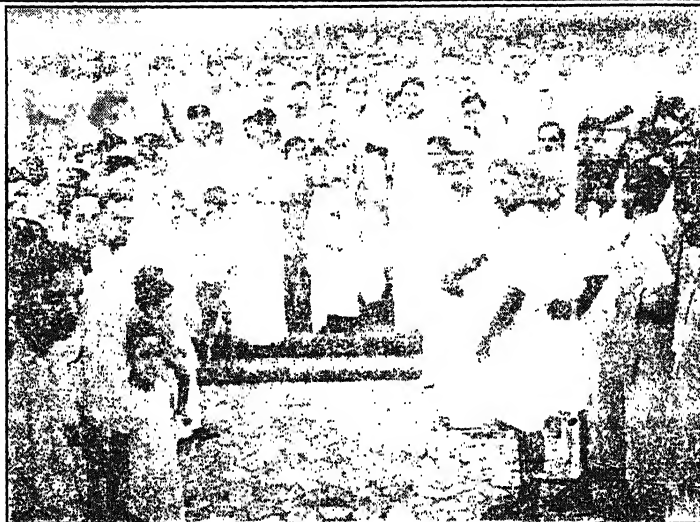
Calicut,  
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**Dr. C. Sreekumaran.**

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\* The National Integrator in action! : Photo taken on the occasion of the discourses conducted by Vazhakunnam at Mattunga, Bombay.



\* Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri addressing a spiritual gathering at Madras.

\* Ref : Bhaktasiromani, Bharatavilasam, Trissur 1949 initial pages and pp 42-43 resp.

**LIFE SKETCH OF VAZHAKUNNAM  
VASUDEVAN NAMBUDIRI**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Kerala river Nila has been famous for its fertility in producing great literary talents. Among them are Tuncat Ezhuttacchan, the most popular pioneer poet in Malayalam, Puntanam Nambudiri, the devotee cum philosopher poet and Melputtur Narayana Bhattatiri, the great Sanskrit scholar poet.

On the banks of the same river was born Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri,\* a conglomeration of these talents in one. He popularised Srimadbhagavatam,\*\* till the last breath of his life. The shower that flowed out of his tongue soothed and enlightened those who eagerly assembled around him. His contribution to bhakti literature in Malayalam as well as in Sanskrit is vast and deep. He played a very dynamic role that caused a striking spiritual reawakening far and wide.

**LIFE**

Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, who was famous as

---

\* In this thesis Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri (Vāḷakunnam Vāsudevan Nambūtiri) is often referred to as Vazhakunnam.

\*\* For diacritical marks of titles of Sanskrit and Malayalam books, refer the select bibliography.

Bhaktasiromani, was born at the famous Mana called Vazhakunnam on Thursday, 12th Medam 1066<sup>1</sup> (23 April 1891),\* which was a Chitrapournami day in the Vrissikam Rasi. His father was Vazhakunnam Raman Atitiripad, and his mother was Parvati Antarjanam, whose native house was Mundakkizhi Kaladi Mana. The Vazhakunnam Mana is situated near the famous Siva temple at Tiruvegappura in Palakkad district in Kerala. This Nambudiri family had been noted for its aristocratic tradition and devotion to vedic studies.

Raman Atitiripad knew the Rigveda Samhita by heart. He was well known for his sense of humour, a speciality of the Nambudiri Brahmins. He had translated the Bhagavadgita and the Ekadasaskandha of Srimadbhagavatam. He had an impressive personality.<sup>2</sup> Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri would have inherited these qualities through his father.

It was his grandfather Kesavan Atitiripad, an ardent devotee of Lord Guruvayurappa, who conducted his Upanayana ceremony and imparted to him the first lessons of knowledge. Being a bril-

---

1. See Bhaktasiromani (Life and Reminiscences), Bharathavilasam, Trichur, 1949, p.5.

\* All the equivalent English dates confirmed with P.V. Sankaranarayanan, Astrologer, Mannampatta, Palghat district.

2. Ibid, pp.4-5.

liant student Vazhakunnam could easily grasp his initial studies including exercises in reading and writing. His mother, being a devotee herself advised him to chant the Panchakshara mantra, five thousand times everyday. She had been impelling her son's activities, observing keenly, and guiding him with necessary directions in the spiritual path. But unfortunately for him, she died of smallpox, when he was only eleven years old.<sup>3</sup>

Among his two brothers and one sister, one predeceased the mother, and others breathed their last within a short period following her death. Thus Vazhakunnam at the very dawn of his adolescence was destined to shoulder a series of misfortunes which deprived him of motherly and brotherly affections. O. Narayanan Nambudiri, the third son of Vazhakunnam revealed this information when interviewed personally. These dreadful strokes that tortured him at the very formative period of life threw him into a miserable solitary situation. This added with the drastic poverty that he suffered later on would have strengthened his stamina and enabled him to face bravely any calamity in life. Again these bitter experiences might have made him more speculative in outlook.

After the diksha period of one year in which Vazhakunnam observed the vratas in connection with his mother's death, his

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3. Taccappilli Govindamenon, Sriguruvayurappante (Bhoolokavaikundesante) Adbutalilakal, Santha Book Stall, Guruvayur pp.140-41.

Samavartana ceremony was conducted. He had the initial study of vedic chanting from the younger brothers of his father - Vasudevan Nambudiri and Nilakanthan Nambudiri, who were traditional vedic scholars. He was only 12 years old, when he studied the Rigveda Samhita, fully byheart with 'pada'.<sup>4</sup> His grandfather had also been giving necessary guidance in his vedic education. This reveals that the vedic heritage was acquired by Vazhakunnam from his own family, which had been preserving and passing the traditional vedic wisdom from one generation to the other. It was a custom among the Keralite Numbudiri Brahmins to make one well-versed in vedic chanting within the period of time between the Upanayana and Samavartana, so that vedic education is imparted at an early stage of life itself. This ancient gurukula system of education transmitted from the tongue of the guru to the tongue of the disciple is preserved in all strictness of its pronunciation along with practices and demonstrations to be performed, by vedic festivals called 'ottuttu' for Yajurveda and 'Trisandha' for Rigveda. It was rather by the oral tradition than by the black and white basis that it lasted to this day. This method of preservation of the vedas has been briefly illustrated and explained by C. Krishnan Nambudiri in one of his published articles.<sup>5</sup> Swami Vivekananda has rightly observed, "The south has

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4. K.P. Narayana Pisharoti, Bhaktasiromani Vasudevan Nambudiriyute Dhanyajeevitam, Bhaktapriya, Book V, No.II, Guruvayur Devasom, Feb. 90, p.16.

5. C. Krishnan Nambudiri, Ottuttu, Mathrubhumi Weekly, 25.4.1954, p.11.

been the repository of vedic learning.’<sup>6</sup>

Vazhakunnam stayed at Tirunavaya Brahmasvom Math for four years for acquiring proficiency in the vedic disciplines including Jata and Ratha under the vedic scholars there. Thus he was able to win the first prize in Jata at the Katavallur Anyonyam.<sup>7</sup> (Katavallur Anyonyam is a famous vedic competition being conducted, at Sriramaswami Kshetra, Katavallur situated on the border of Malappuram and Trichur districts. Tough competitions between the brahmin vedic scholars belonging to Tirunavaya and Trichur Brahmasvom Maths take place. The residences were arranged for them separately and were respectively called ‘Pakshi’ and ‘Accutattu’. The members of one should not mingle or talk with those of the other, once the ‘anyonyam’ started. This was to keep the strictness of the test. Technical words like ‘Kadannirikkal’, ‘Munpilirikkal’, ‘Kalampi’ etc. have special significance with the vedic competition. Kunnikkuttan Tampuram has authoritatively highlighted even the minute details of Katavallur anyonyam).<sup>8</sup>

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6. Swami Vivekananda, Selections from the complete works of Swami Vivekananda, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Jan. 1987, p.473.
  7. Tachappilli Govindamenon, *op. cit.* p.142.
  8. Kunnikkuttan Tampuran, Kunnikkuttan Tampurante Gadyalekhanangal, D.C. Books, Kottayam, 1983. pp. 87-89.

From his early days itself Vazhakunnam had firm belief in Sri Rama and Ramamantra. He was smart and eloquent. He had a large circle of friends of different tastes. Once his stepmother fearing that he would be misled to playing cards, dice or other habits, arranged a Naivilakku for Dakshinamurti, the deity of Sukapura temple, after having pledged her earrings for the purpose.<sup>9</sup>

While at home and outside, Vazhakunnam was strict, regular and punctual in his sadhana of Panchaksharajapa after ablution at 3 p.m. every day, irrespective of his busy activities. This had been recommended to him by his late mother.

Now Vazhakunnam, a teenager, studied the basic lessons of Kathakali, music, drama-acting, and the game of chess. By four years he was able to master them to a considerable extent.<sup>10</sup> He had written and acted a drama named Nilavenisvayamvaram. His eloquence too was praiseworthy.<sup>11</sup>

He was now a young man of twenty years. It was his inner urge to study Sanskrit, that took him to Varikkumancheri Mana where within a short period he got acquainted with Kavyas, Natakas, Alamkaras, Tarkasangraha, Muktavali, Dinakariyam etc.

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9. Taccappilli Govindamenon, op.cit., p.142.

10. K.P. Narayana Pisharoti, op.cit., p.16.

11. See Bhaktasiromani, op.cit., p.8.

From there he went to Pakaravoor Mana at Mukkola. There he stayed worshipping the Bhagavati at the Mukkola temple and studied higher texts on Tarka like Cadurdasalaksani from the eminent Sanskrit scholar Pakaravoor Nilakanthan Nambudiri. It was he, who nominated Vazhakunnam in response to the letter asking him to direct two students from Pakaravoor, eligible to be admitted in the Vedanta Vidyalaya organised by the great scholar Pareekshit Kunjunni Tampuran at Tripunithura. Vazhakunnam studied Pancadasih, Vedantaparibhasa and Siddhantalessasangraham from the great scholar Panchapagesasastris, who on request gave him the Bhasyopadesa. It was Kirangattu Kunjunni Nambudiripad, who taught him Samanyanirukti. Dinakariyam text was taught to him in detail by Pareekshit Tampuran. During his stay there, he had been regularly worshipping the deity of the temple at Tripunithura.<sup>12</sup> He had also been practising Mantropasanas and doing bhajans. K.P. Narayana Pisharoti has pointed out that the period of Vazhakunnam's stay for studying Vedanta at Tripunithura was one year.<sup>13</sup>

Later as advised by the great Sanskrit scholar Tarkatilakan Vidvan Mantitta Nambudiri, he began to worship the deity of the Mukkottil Bhagavati Kshetra, setting aside his studies for a small period. His Upasana was a little different from that of others. He

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12. Taccappilli Govindamenon, op.cit., p.143.

13. K.P. Narayana Pisharoti, op.cit., p.16.

chanted the Lalithasahasranama sitting on the Mandapa of the temple facing Bhagavati, the deity of the temple. His strong mental imagination was that she herself was his guru, powerful enough to give him the mantropadesa.<sup>14</sup>

He returned to Tiruvegappura and started a Sanskrit school named 'Harivilasam'. He himself was one of the teachers. With the help of the twenty sincere students on roll, he was able to set up a reading room in connection with the school.<sup>15</sup> Vazhakunnam's inner urge to propagate and develop Sanskrit language and literature had materialised into the school, reading room and the activities connected with these.

It was during this time that Vazhakunnam came to know of a Goa lottery that had announced its first prize of 70,000 pounds; the place of its draw was Bombay.<sup>16</sup> Vazhakunnam's pathetic condition of poverty forced him to think that the only remedy to solve his problems was winning the lottery. So he decided to test his fortune. But to his disappointment, he did not have even Rs.10/- to buy the lottery ticket. He borrowed the amount from his neighbour Kesavan Nambudiri of Azhakappura Mana.<sup>17</sup>

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14. Taccappilli Govindamenon, op.cit., p.144.

15. K.P. Narayana Pisharoti, op.cit., p.16.

16. Taccappilli Govindamenon, op.cit., p.144.

17. K.P. Narayana Pisharoti, op.cit., p.16.

After a deep thought, Vazhakunnam decided to experiment in the spiritual line, which he thought was the best way to win the first prize. He started praying Bhagavati with Sricakrapooja and Lalitha-sahasranamapushpanjali. He continued his worship for six months till the date of draw of the lottery.<sup>18</sup>

He was not fortunate. He did not win any prize in the lottery. He thought that it was due to his inability in pleasing the deity by worship. He was perhaps destined to reveal the spiritual ideals to others. He decided to go to Kodungallur and worship the deity of the famous Kodungallur Kshetra, to get fresh enlightenment. He studied 10 chapters of Hora in Jyotisha from Kodungallur Valiya Koccunni Tampuran. He had been regularly listening to the Bhagavata Purana, preached by Cheriya Koccunni Tampuran. He had been staying at Kodungallur, the well renowned Gurukula centre, in study and worship for more than five years.<sup>19</sup>

In 1093 (Mal. era), Srimulam Tirunal Maharaja of Travancore was celebrating his 60th birthday. In connection with it there was a conference of scholars, who came from different parts to exhibit their scholarship. Vazhakunnam participated at the conference and his scholarship was honoured with prize. On returning to Kodungallur, he made arrangements for performing Lalithasahasranama-pushpanjali at the temple for that auspicious

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18. *Ibid.*, p. 16

19. *Ibid.*, p.16.

Mandala period of 41 days, during his days of absence. He felt that his life would be meaningless if he could not help the humanity and so he prayed the deity\* “Kindly end my life if I am of no use to others.”<sup>20</sup> From Kodungallur, he went straightaway to Kadathanattu Kovilakam.

On reaching there, within a few days his legs were found paralysed and immovable due to rheumatism. He was having terrific pain and there was nobody to serve him. Lying on the bed he lamented, “Oh, Vathagehadhinatha, Guruvayurappa, please cure me of vataroga. If cured by tomorrow, the first step I take will be to Guruvayur; I will pray there for 12 days.” He had gone to sleep. To his surprise the next day, when he woke up, his legs were normal. He was cured of the pain. At once he prostrated before the Lord of his heart and started to Guruvayur.<sup>21</sup> Vazhakunnam himself has sung about it in his Malayalam work, Bhagavatasangraham.<sup>22</sup> Here he says to Lord Guruvayurappa that since he left Kodungallur in 1093, he had been roaming about much in distress before reaching the Lord.

Vazhakunnam worshipped Guruvayurappa for twelve days and kept his promise. One day as he was doing pradakshina at

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\* In this thesis translations into English have been made by the author.

20. Taccappilli Govindamenon, op.cit., p.145.

21. K.P. Narayana Pisharoti, op.cit., p.16.

22. Ibid., p.16.

the Srikrishna temple, Guruvayur, an elderly bhakta asked him certain doubts regarding two slokas of Bhagavata.\* Instantaneously flowed out Vazhakunnam's reply, elaborate and surprising, and this incidentally became the initial point of his enlightening lifelong ray of Bhagavata preaching. Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad one of the direct disciples of Vazhakunnam, has mentioned about this incident.<sup>23</sup> Taccappilli Govindamenon identifies this elderly bhakta to be Nessleri Nambudiripad who persuaded Vazhakunnam to do his maiden speech on Bhagavata<sup>24</sup>

The audience who were immersed in the nectar of bhakti, congratulating Vazhakunnam's powerful style of speech, requested him to continue his Bhagavata exposition. Guruvayur Kootampala was for the first time opened for Bhagavata preaching. Vazhakunnam's talk took place exactly from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. everyday.<sup>25</sup> The number of audience increased day by day. K.P. Narayana Pisharoti, while he was a little boy about seventy years ago, had attended Vazhakunnam's talk at Guruvayur Kootampala. The sweet and touching words of Vazhakunnam had made his eyes wet - he remembers, "That Bhaktasiromani, by drawing

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\* In this thesis Bhagavata denotes Srimadbhagavatam of Vyasa.

23. Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad, Personal diary (unpublished).

24. Taccappilli Govindamenon, op.cit., p.146.

25. Ibid., p.146.

quite often beautiful word pictures of form, poses and situations of sweet Krishna, made the audience weep with sublime joy and bhakti. His inspiring ability to make them bow down and chant aloud the name of Govinda seemed unique.”<sup>26</sup>

Vazhakunnam stayed and worshipped at Guruvayur for four years. During that period he used to read daily the Ekadasaskandha of Srimadbhagavatam sitting at the Mandapa at dusk, after the Deeparadhana was over. Taccappilli Govindamenon recollects, “only those who have experienced that nectar of music can dream of it.” He observes, “Lord Guruvayurappa and Bhagavata were his Paradevatas.”<sup>27</sup>

Wherever he went, whether it was in Guruvayur or outside, Vazhakunnam used to invite the people to Guruvayur Kshetra declaring, “I am neither an agent nor am I inviting you in that spirit. The Kshetra at Guruvayur belongs to the galaxy of great men like Sri Sankara, Vilvamangalam, Melputtur, Puntanam and Kunnikkavu Nambudiripad. That is the sacred temple in my imagination, which is the property owned by all of them.”<sup>28</sup>

Vazhakunnam was 27 years old when he had started worshipping Lord Guruvayurappa, the deity of Guruvayur temple; due

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26. K.P. Narayana Pisharoti, op.cit., pp.15-17.

27. Taccappilli Govindamenon, op.cit., pp.148-49.

28. Quoted Ibid., p.148.

to vataroga. Melputtur too started his worship of the Lord of Guruvayur due to vataroga in the age of 27 - observes K.P. Narayana Pisharoti.<sup>29</sup>

One day, while he was asleep, Vazhakunnam happened to see an unusual dream in which a divine person who smeared sacred bhasma powder all over the body appeared and asked him to give a talk at Chidambaram. Vazhakunnam went there and delivered a lecture on the Ekadasaskandha of Bhagavata purana.<sup>30</sup>

On 27th Tulam 1097 (12 November 1921) Vazhakunnam, who was then 31 years old, married Parvathi Antarjanam, who belonged to the Othalur Mana situated at Patramangalam about 10 kms from Kunnamkulam. To the couple three sons and five daughters were born.\* The eldest of them, the late Sankaranarayanan Nambudiri, had been following his father's path of Bhagavata exposition. Though Vazhakunnam had been spending the rest of his life at Othalur Mana, he used to go to Guruvayur and read Bhagavata at least once in a month.<sup>31</sup>

Vazhakunnam's stay at Othalur Mana played an important role in changing the atmosphere of that locality. within a few days

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29. K.P. Narayana Pisharoti, op.cit., p.17.

30. Taccappilli Govindamenon, op.cit., p.149.

\* For more informations see pp. 272,273.

31. Ibid., pp.149-150.

itself he was loved and respected by the people there. Many of his neighbours were enlightened with the puranic stories and bhakti culture. Even in his grihasthasrama, Vazhakunnam spent most of his time propagating Krishnabhakti. He also found time to teach Sanskrit to his stepbrother Vazhakunnam Nilakanthan Nambudiri, who later became a well-honoured magician.<sup>32</sup> Vazhakunnam also taught Narayaniyam in the traditional method to his neighbour Vadakkath Neelakandhan Nambissan, who still remembers him respectfully.

Vazhakunnam, after his marriage started going outside Garuvayur for giving talks and lectures in addition to Bhagavata preaching. His outlook had been slightly modified. He had now become a religious reformer, but with a great difference. Among other so called religious reformers, Vazhakunnam was an exception. He did not hate other religions and never considered any religion superior to the other. He never had disrespect to other religions. Vazhakunnam realised that he must travel far and wide to create spiritual awareness among the Indians, who had no proper understanding of Indian culture and tradition. Vazhakunnam felt disappointed on seeing the misleading impacts of westernization. So he, with firm determination and enthusiasm, decided to take steps for removing the religious misunderstandings of the people of different parts of the country.<sup>33</sup>

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32. Njayath Balan, Vazhakunnathinte indrajalakathakal, Mathrubhumi Weekly, Calicut, June 18-24, 95, p.17.

33. See Taccappilli Govindamenon, *op.cit.*, p.150.

His first public address was at Vivekodayam school, Trichur, in 1098. He had been invited to give a talk based on religious aspects. He attracted the audience with interpretations of ideas of bhakti mingled with humour harmoniously. He was requested to give a series of lectures in connection with Bhagavata. To make it most convenient and helpful for employees and students, Vazhakunnam agreed to arrange the talks from 7.30 a.m. to 9 a.m. at Trichur Koottampala for a period of 41 days.

There, on one day Vazhakunnam was talking on Vilvamangalam. One of the bhaktas came up with the remark that the Naduvil Math, where Vilvamangalam's samadhi had taken place, was nearby. He also spoke of its sanctity. Vazhakunnam realised it and so after the day's lecture, went there with the silent audience. The unexpected pilgrimage was a source of inspiration and excitement for them. The scene was visualised by the public with respect and anxiety.<sup>34</sup> This incident throws light on Vazhakunnam's character. He was strict to his words. He acted what he preached and preached only that he would act. He lived a life befitting a Bhagavata preacher and was humble and simple in his outlook.

Once Vazhakunnam gave a talk in a public function held at Tiruvegappura on behalf of Tilak Samaj. There he talked rather in a political vein quoting the story of prahlada, whom he

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34. *Ibid.*, p.151.

characterised as a symbol of protest against the foreign rule.<sup>35</sup> He was able to influence the mass highly and could make them chant 'Narayana'. He proved his ability to approach social problems with the aid of puranic and religious stories, situations and concepts.

On being invited to Ernakulam, Vazhakunnam gave a two weeks' lecture on Bhishmastuti which was appreciated by the listeners consisting of all sections of the society.

On request, Vazhakunnam next delivered a spiritual talk at Tripunithura palace. There he was honoured by the award of a couple of veerasrimkhalas. The members of the palace were so happy to arrange a decorated chariot taking Vazhakunnam seated in it around the Tripunithurayappa, in the pradakshina path. The musical instruments added to the festive nature of the occasion crowded with the joyful and excited devotees.<sup>36</sup> Due to a suggestion from the soul, which Vazhakunnam believed to be the words of Guruvayurappa, he decided to give one veerasrimkhala to Sri Krishna, the deity at Nelluvai and the other one to Lord Narasimha, the deity at Tonnallur temple.

It was in 1924 that Vazhakunnam was invited to Kozhikode to give a spiritual discourse. The purity, sweetness and pleasing

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35. *Ibid.*, p.152.

36. *Ibid.*, p.153.

nature of his language caught the attention of the people and impressed even those who were not ready to accept his views.

Next his talk was arranged at Trichur Kootampala. It lasted for one month. Advocate L.A. Subbarama Iyer and retd. judge V.K. Sankaramenon etc. were present to hear him. Mr. Menon asked Vazhakunnam how he had been able to control the huge number of people, who sat silently around him. Vazhakunnam's reply was very simple, "Just like the two year old baby Lord Krishna, who illustrated the whole world in his mouth opened before his mother."<sup>37</sup>

While Vazhakunnam was staying there at Trichur for his spiritual discourses, he was also called for giving talks on various subjects (apart from spiritual topics) at different public functions. He gave three talks at Vivekodayam High School. Due to his attractive presentation of subjects given to him, he was continuously requested to give talks at Girls H.S., Irinjalakuda, Victoria Girl's High School, C.M.S. High School, Govt. High School, St. Thomas College, Training School, Srimoolasthanam and Nambudiri Idyalaya. He talked in and around Trichur on topics selected by the organisers. Through his lectures he could develop any topic given to him most interestingly to the common folk and thus was able to earn love and respect from all quarters. As an orator he had by now attained name and fame. People like Mankada Krishna Varma were so much interested in his talks that they felt

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. Quoted, *Ibid.*, p.156.

the need of arranging his impressive talks wherever possible.<sup>38</sup>

During the festival seasons in the temples, Vazhakunnam was invited to give lectures. It was R. Krishna Pillai, then Commissioner who arranged these functions as he thought that Vazhakunnam's speeches could enlighten any audience. It was he, who arranged Vazhakunnam's talk at Thriuvananthapuram as well.

At Thiruvananthapuram, Vazhakunnam stayed at Ramanamath palace, which was usually meant only for the stay of special guests and kings. Among the audience for his talks for three weeks at Tampanur Hall, there were people from all sections of the society - litterateurs like Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer, officials, advocates and the like, apart from a large number of other people.<sup>39</sup> He talked from 7 p.m to 8.30 p.m. on all days taking into consideration the convenience of the people of different occupations. The king, who was so much attracted by his lectures, gave him one hundred and one rupees as coins, which was a custom in those days to honour the reputed. The king humbly requested him to go to Kanakakkunnu palace, the place of his residence. As planned earlier, Vazhakunnam was taken to that place where he gave a talk for an hour and a half.

He was for the second time called upon by his admirers to Calicut. To hear the talk A.K.T.K.M. Guptan Nambudiripad had

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38. *Ibid.*, p.156.

39. *Ibid.*, p.157.

also arrived. With him was seen a man who wore suit and a turban. That man seemed to be not interested in Vazhakunnam's talk. He did not like Vazhakunnam's very appearance itself - The naked upper part of the body was not covered with a shirt and again the loose hair was tied according to the custom of Nambudiri Brahmins as sikha. Vazhakunnam's words had some magical effect on the audience. The words pierced into the depth of their hearts. Once he was eloquent on the character of Satidevi, who went to her father's sacrifice, without taking permission from her husband Siva. It was not due to pride but due to her immense love for her father that Satidevi went to the sacrifice conducted by her father, disregarding Siva, the very name which burns into ashes all sins. Vazhakunnam's very speech in excitement was felt as though Satidevi herself was talking in front of the audience just before ending her life in the sacrificial fire.

The man who had come there dressed in suit and turban, now started wiping his eyes filled with tears. This man stood with great respect for Vazhakunnam. He was introduced by A.K.T.K.M. Guptan Nambudiripad. To his surprise it was none other than Appu Nedungadi. He was a leading advocate, very rich, and famous as the founder of the Nedungadi Bank. Vazhakunnam said that he had read the famous Malayalam novel Kundalata and so had heard of him as the author of the work. Now Appu Nedungadi humbly told him that though he had already heard of Vazhakunnam, he had not attended any of his talks, as he was a

rationalist and did not believe in spiritual matters. He told Vazhakunnam, that by hearing the speech, he had realised his own mistakes and requested Vazhakunnam to accept him as one of his disciples. With his head bent with respect, he said humbly that he felt himself elevated by calling himself 'Adiyan', for the first time in life, that too, in front of Vazhakunnam.<sup>40</sup> By a mere talk Vazhakunnam was able to change a man - not just a layman but a distinguished novelist.

Later Vazhakunnam had his preachings at the following centres - one week at Purameri Kovilakam, one week at Nilambur Kovilakam, one week at Pumulli Mana and one week at Mankada Kovilakam. Then his talk was arranged at Thirumandhamkunnu Devi Kshetra at Angadippuram. Taccappilli Govindamenon has given a detailed account of the series of talks of Vazhakunnam.<sup>41</sup>

He next addressed the audience at Tiruvangottu near Tellichery. From there he went to the Porkkali Devi Kshetra. There his conversation was on Rugminiswayamvara. From there he went to Vadakkisvara to give a speech. On his return his talks were arranged at Chirakkal Kovilakam, Cherukunnu Devi Kshetra and Tiruvangottu Kshetra, where he gave lectures for three consecutive days.

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40. *Ibid.*, p.160.

41. *Ibid.*, p.160f.

It was in 1103, that his father Raman Atitiripad fell ill. Vazhakunnam, who reached there to nurse him, was directed by him to go back to Guruvayur and continue the Bhagavata preaching. His father said that by doing so, many others also will be benefitted in the spiritual path along with him. His father's demise was in (Pooram nakshatra in Makaram) the year 1105 (c.1930). Vazhakunnam observed one year diksha in connection with his father's death. In a car brought by the Devasvom Commissioner, Vazhakunnam was taken to Vaikkam to give a talk in connection with the Sahasrakalasa ceremony arranged by Travancore Maharani.

As his diksha was over, he started his Guruvayur talks again. These were his best years fully immersed in the Bhagavata. It was in 1106, that he wrote the stanzas in Malayalam on Guruvayurappa which was later published under the title Vasudevakarnamrtam. He had already written a community oriented novel and many other slokas.

He came back to Othalur Mana. It was during this time that the Guruvayur Sathyagraha (1931-32) took place. Vazhakunnam continued his prayer and worship of Guruvayurappa at his house itself. He was always punctual in his poojas and pushpanjali.

Vazhakunnam, started his talk, this time as Panchadasaha, at the Guruvayur Kootampala. Day by day more and more people came enthusiastically to hear him. Vazhakunnam, by his powerful

words was able to get the people's co-operation and participation till the end of his lectures. By this time Vazhakunnam had completed 5 'Mura' (times) Bhagavata reading at Guruvayur temple.

His fame as a great orator spread far and wide. He was invited to Kollam and Kottayam. He was quite often a distinguished guest at functions, that solemnized at Kumaranallur Devikshetra, including occasions like the Mahanavaratri festival.

In the Murajapa (vedic chanting) that was held about the year 1936 at Thiruvananthapuram, Vazhakunnam's Bhagavata interpretation was a special item.

Later Vazhakunnam's oratory was welcomed by the Malayalees at Madras,\* where Vazhakunnam's stay was arranged by advocate Desamangalam. In the papers including Hindu the news was flashed.<sup>42</sup>

It was during this period, invited by Venkitarama Iyer, a resident of Bombay and native of Guruvayur that Vazhakunnam reached Bombay\* to read Narayaniyam of Melputtur Narayana Bhattathiri. At the end of a month's spiritual discourse there, Vazhakunnam was given a very warm send off. He was accompanied to the railway station by a large number of people, who chanted Govindanama samkirtanas through the streets of Bombay.

42. Ibid., p.164.

\* For photographs see p22 of this book

Even in the subsequent year, Vazhakunnam's talk that lasted for a month, was all the more appreciated by those in Bombay. It is noteworthy that Vazhakunnam, who talked in Malayalam language was appreciated, especially when there was a belief in Bombay that talking Malayalam was against fashion.

It was on 5th Chingam, (21 Aug. 1938) that the famous Bhagavata interpreter Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad, who later became one of the greatest disciples of Vazhakunnam, first met him. He had narrated this incident in a highly touching manner. He had heard of Vazhakunnam and was eager to see him. He prayed Guruvayurappa to bless him to fulfill his desire to meet him. After darsana, he was doing pradakshina, when he met one of his friends. To his enquiry his friend pointing at Vazhakunnam said, "There he is!...."<sup>43</sup>

Tattayoor turned back. He was surprised to see a form looking unusually divine. He saw there a figure which looked like the embodiment of peace, with bhasma marks on his forehead, wearing a mundu that reached upto his knee, and having a similar wet piece of cloth on the shoulders. The very look was saturated with sympathy towards all. Tattayoor felt as though the fashionless appearance covered the divinity in him. At the very first sight Vazhakunnam attracted him. Tattayoor accompanied him to his residence.

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43. Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad, personal diary, p.8.

Vazhakunnam returned to the Koottampala for the talk. As directed, his disciple Venmani Nambudiripad and Tattayoor sat with him on the stage. The talk started after the Pantheeradi pooja at the Guruvayur temple. The talk continued for 1½ hours, in front of an alert audience including Mekkad and Purayannur Nambudiris. The talk on Bhramaragitam that was quite often made more attractive by the rendering of Govindanama samkirtana, made the audience weep and laugh. Tattayoor himself experienced it forgetting the limitations of time and space. At Guruvayur, in the company of Vazhakunnam, Tattayoor had forgotten that 7 days had passed. So he decided to return to his house to serve his father.

But to his surprise, Tattayoor could not go home as his legs seemed paralysed. So, as advised by Padappa Nambudiri, Tattayoor decided to stay at Guruvayur itself doing prayer for 41 days. During the period, he felt that Vazhakunnam, whom he had started considering as his guru was none other than Guruvayurappa himself.<sup>44</sup>

It was in this period (Karkidakam 1113), that Vazhakunnam started his Ashtadasaha reading of Bhagavata at Guruvayur Koottampala. After 4 days, due to reasons of ill health, Vazhakunnam asked his disciple Tottam Vasudevan Nambudiri to read Bhagavata along with him.

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44. *Ibid.*, pp.12-13.

Starting from 3<sup>rd</sup> Kanni 1114 (19 Sept.1938), the famous Peruvanam speeches, appreciated by scholars of different schools of thought were conducted by Vazhakunnam and Tottam together at the Mandapa of Irattayappa. The talk started at 1 p.m. The guru and the disciple, both read for 1½ hrs each and the talk ended at 4 p.m. After 4 p.m. they returned to Tiruvullakkavu where they stayed till noon on the next day doing prayers, sadhanas and daily rituals before Sri Sastha, the deity of the temple.<sup>45</sup>

Vazhakunnam along with his disciple went to Cittur Mana; and then to Cerppil Bhagavati Kshetra. In both these places he gave spiritual talks. In Kanni 1115, Vazhakunnam gave a spiritual lecture at Tripunithura. The topic was 'Uddhavadootu'.

In Meenam 1117, a Bhagavata reading of Vazhakunnam was arranged by Pumulli Valiya Vasudevan Nambudiripad at the Guruvayur Koottampala.<sup>46</sup> The reading that lasted for twenty one days was noteworthy for various reasons. All his 4 disciples Tottam, Venmani, Patirisseri and Nenminimangalam were present there to hear his talks along with other Bhagavata interpreters like Mekkad, Purayannoor, Padappa, Pandam and Kadalayil Nambudiri.

It was a function with many peculiarities. Venmani

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45. Taccappilli Govindamenon, op.cit., pp.166-67.

46. Tattayoor, op.cit., pp.13-16.

Nambudiripad did the poojas. Patirisseri and Tottam read the text of Bhagavata. Tattayoor Apphan Nambudiripad was the parikarmi. Vazhakunnam gave the talk. The spiritual discourses continued for 21 days and took place from 9 a.m., to 11.30 a.m. and 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. on every day. Tattayoor has mentioned that he has not experienced in his life time a Bhagavata interpretation of that type. This was the first one in which all the four disciples of Vazhakunnam and so also Tattayoor had participated. Tattayoor stayed at Othalur Mana serving Vazhakunnam for about 6 months. Vazhakunnam had been composing the work Bhagavatasangraham. Tattayoor assisted him as a scribe and wrote the fair copy of the work from morning till night while Venmani made its rough copy.

Once, Mekkad Nambudiri had come to Vazhakunnam to discuss some problems, in connection with certain accounts, the details of which had to be furnished to Pumulli Vasudevan Nambudiripad. Mekkad, being a bhakta had been always doing prayers and worship and had forgotten to keep the accounts. Even before he told about it, Vazhakunnam said, "I have told everything to Guruvayurappa; no body will ask about those accounts to you." Mekkad met Pumulli at his residence, who welcomed him with great respect. But he did not even utter a word about these accounts though Mekkad stayed there for one whole day. Quoting this incident, Tattayoor hints at Vazhakunnam's ability to read the minds of others.

Tattayoor has also mentioned another incident of the same type. Once when he was financially weak, he went to Vazhakunnam to take permission to return home from Guruvayur. Vazhakunnam, was busy then. Afternoon, before Tattayoor could say anything to him, Vazhakunnam taking some copies of his book Tiruvullakkavile Ormakkurippukal asked Tattayoor to sell it. He added “You take half the amount and give me half.”<sup>47</sup>

Tattayoor recalls from memory of having accompanied his guru Vazhakunnam to Vaikkam, Ambalappuzha, Kumaranallur etc. He had also read Bhagavata 18 times as directed by Vazhakunnam. His first lecture was at the famous Katavallur Sri Rama Kshetra which he had conducted according to Vazhakunnam’s advice. Again as per his advice, Tattayoor had read Bhagavata at Avanapparamba and Cherukunnathu Mana. Vazhakunnam’s sincerity in giving step to step guidance to his disciples is evident from the words of Tattayoor.

Vazhakunnam has not only popularised the Bhagavatapurana far and wide, but has also developed a galaxy of Bhagavata exponents. Vazhakunnam did foster them in the way he wished. His training had its result. All his disciples have lived according to the principles befitting Bhagavata readers. They dedicated their life for that purpose. More over they have further instilled this spirit to the next generation, thus attracting more youths to the field.

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47. Ibid., p.22.

Of the present day Bhagavata exponents the famous Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad, who had been shining brightly is his direct disciple. Most of the others are disciples of Vazhakunnam's direct disciples like Patirisseri Damodaran Nambudiri, Venmani Parameswaran Nambudiripad, Nenminimangalam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Tottam Vasudevan Nambudiri and Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad. To say the least, the present generation of Bhagavata scholars are directly or indirectly indebted to Vazhakunnam. Vazhakunnam's role in popularising Bhagavata tradition is thus of foremost importance. He has played a considerable role in developing Guruvayur as a centre of Bhagavata culture and study.

Vazhakunnam was now 53 years old. He was suffering from chronic diabetes. It was on 1st Karkidakam 1119 (16 July 1944), that he addressed the audience in a sloka in Akhyashashti 'Aye jihvapeedhe.....'<sup>48</sup> The function was arranged by Mekkad, an ardent propagator of Namajapa. He for the first time in life digressed from his usual habit of reading and explaining either Srimadbhagavatam or Narayaniyam only. He confirmed that such digressions would never be repeated in life. 'This would be perhaps my last talk' he said and in fact, it was true. That was his last talk.

During this time, he had been writing a commentary on Bhagavata in the order - introduction, anvaya, meaning and com-

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48. Ibid., p.23.

ments for each sloka. But unfortunately, he could not complete this work due to his fatal ill health.

Sri Kerala Varma, the Maharaja of Cochin was celebrating his 80th birthday on 2nd Dhanu 1112 (16 Dec.1936). In connection with it he invited Vazhakunnam, honoured him with Kirtimudra and conferred him the title 'Bhaktasiromani'. Vazhakunnam was also given a cash award of one hundred rupees. A monthly honourarium of Rs.20/- was also announced for him. As Vazhakunnam was bed ridden due to diabetes at the Othalur Mana, he could not go for the convocational function. Later P. Nandana Menon, was sent by the king, to give the award and the cash prize. Vazhakunnam, as a token of love for the king, sent to him the Guruvayur Kalabhprasada.<sup>49</sup>

His diabetic condition worsened and wounds began to appear on his shins. Tattayoor Apphan Nambudiripad, was always there serving him. Venmani, Tottam and Patirisseri visited him frequently. Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad also was there quite often, serving him.

A few days later his legs got paralysed and immovable. As directed by his doctor Govindamenon, Vazhakunnam was taken to Guruvayur by his eldest son Sankaranarayanan, on 4th Makaram

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49. Taccappilli Govindamenon, op.cit., p.168.

1121 (17 Jan. 1946).<sup>50</sup>

Vazhakunnam was under the treatment of Dr. Govindamenon for about a month. During this time it was an old lady of Variyar community who arranged for his stay there at Guruvayur with high respect for him. Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad was looking after his guru's physical cleanliness.

Vazhakunnam talked only the essence of Bhagavata now to his close circle of friends and disciples. Most of the time he kept silent. He chanted 'Krishna, Krishna' always and spent time reading Narayaniyam, and recited the Bhagavata stanzas in so low a voice that others could not hear. Though the chronic diabetes deprived him of sweetness from outside, Vazhakunnam was incessantly experiencing the sweetness of Krishna consciousness internally.

During this period one Kulasseri Nambudiri came there with certain psychological problems, which he thought was due to some unseen supernatural forces. Vazhakunnam directed Tattayoor to read Bhagavata at Guruvayur as Saptaha for him. He guaranteed Kulasseri of his cure. Kulasseri returned to Vazhakunnam to tell him that he was cured of his problems, by which time Tattayoor had finished the Bhagavatasaptaha. Vazhakunnam's belief in

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50. Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad, op.cit., p.24

Guruvayurappa and his helping mentality is evident from this incident.<sup>51</sup>

On 9<sup>th</sup> Meenam 1121 (22 March 1946) Vazhakunnam was admitted at Dr.Krishna Iyer's Nursing Home, Trichur, as Vazhakunnam felt that a change in treatment was needed for the improvement of health. Vazhakunnam's son Sankaranarayanan and Tattayoor had been staying there serving him for ten days. Tattayoor returned to Guruvayur, due to ill health. Venmani Nambudiripad who had arrived stayed there for serving him instead of Tattayoor.<sup>52</sup>

On 29<sup>th</sup> Meenam (11 April), after twenty days of treatment, Vazhakunnam was discharged and he went to Othalur Mana, as directed by Dr. Krishna Iyer. At home, he was given Ayurvedic treatment by the famous Ashtavaidyan Kuttancheri Mahan Moose.<sup>53</sup>

On 10<sup>th</sup> Medam 1121 (23 April 1946) the honorarium for four months awarded by the Government of Cochin reached him. Vazhakunnam took Rs. 52 out of it and kept it separately for 'Pancasarappayasa' for Lord Guruvayurappa.<sup>54</sup> With his hands put on his wife's head, he blessed her whole-heartedly, without

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51. *Ibid.*, p.26.

52. *Ibid.*, p.28.

53. *Ibid.*, p.29.

54. Taccappilli Govindamenon, *op.cit.*, p.169.

uttering a word. She had been serving him, to her best, throughout.

At 3.30 p.m.. on the same day, Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad reached there. After having read Bhishmastuti, Prahladaastuti and Gajendrastuti from the Bhagavata, he sprinkled the sacred water of Ganga mixed with Kalaphaprasada of Guruvayur temple on Vazhakunnam's body.<sup>55</sup> Tattayoor was really fortunate to give thirtha to his spiritual master.<sup>56</sup> Sahasranama chanting reverberated in the atmosphere.<sup>57</sup> Vazhakunnam passed away at 10.30 p.m..<sup>58</sup> He had to condense his various ambitious activities into a short life span of 55 years.

Vazhakunnam had always been praying Lord Guruvayurappa, "Oh Bhagavan Muraleedhara, at the last moments of my life, I may kindly be blessed to have ecstasy by enjoying your divine figure with my eyes, ears and mind. No, that is not enough. At the time of death, please show me that divine and auspicious form adorned with flute in the hand and peacock feather on the lock."<sup>59</sup>

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55. Ibid., p.170.

56. Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad, op.cit., p.30

57. Ibid., p.29.

58. Sankaranarayanan, Pitrusmaranakal, Bhaktasiromani, op.cit., p.197.

59. Taccappilli Govindamenon, op.cit., p.170.

His face was peaceful and pleasant at the time of demise;<sup>60</sup> Vaisravanath Raman Nambudiri observes, "Vazhakunnam would have been experiencing viyogabhakti in his last moments."<sup>61</sup>

The people who witnessed the departure of the great soul with wet eyes, were astonished to see Garuda doing pradakshina at the sky,<sup>62</sup> which is believed to be an auspicious signal.

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60. Ibid., p.170.

61. Vaisravanath Raman Nambudiri, introduction to Vasudevanandini of Vazhakunnam, Gita Press, Trichur 72.

62. Taccappilli Govindamenon, op.cit., p.170.

### SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF VAZHAKUNNAM

A study of any great man, whether he be a poet, a philosopher or a spiritual leader cannot be accomplished if the influence of the time and space factors on him is not accounted properly. The various facets of the life of Vazhakunnam too was shaped according to the pulses of the period and the society he lived in.

Being a member of an orthodox Nambudiri family, he had to face many a social problem, binding it, then. But before analysing them closely, a glimpse at the socio-cultural and political situations of the Indians with special reference to the Keralites of that period would be relevant to get a better perspective on their impact in the making of Vazhakunnam, his views and literature.

Vazhakunnam's life was between the last decade of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century which was a period that witnessed many a freedom struggle in India.

The year 1857 completed a century of British rule in India, dating from the Battle of Plassey.<sup>1</sup> It may be regarded as the

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1. R.C. Majumdar & P.N. Chopra, Main currents of Indian History, Sterling Publishers Private Ltd., New Delhi, 1985, pp. 200-1.

dividing line between two ages and is marked by two great events responsible for this change - the great revolt of 1857, popularly known as Sepoy Mutiny and the second, the establishment of three universities Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, which is the logical fulfilment of English Education. The revolt spread widely to different parts and the leaders like Jhansi Rani and Tantia Tope had to give up their life for it. To some it was a mere Sepoy Mutiny, but to many it was but a war of Independence.

Of the religious reforms, the Brahmo Samaj founded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1828<sup>2</sup> mainly aimed at the social reforms like the introduction of widow marriage and female education, and the abolition of Sati and child marriage. The modern English education would have helped the founder to think more rationally in reforming religious aspects including caste systems and restrictions that prevailed then.

The Arya Samaj was founded by Dayananda Saraswati in 1875. He denounced the worship of gods and encouraged intercaste marriages. He insisted upon the veneration of cows and the sacrifice of butter in the hearthfire. It could develop national consciousness. One of the characteristic features of Aryasamaj is the Suddhi Sangathan<sup>3</sup>, which means the reconver-

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2. K. Damodaran, *Bharatiya Cinta*, State Insitute of Languages, Trivandrum, '92, p.465.
  3. R.C. Majumdar and P.N. Chopra, op.cit. p.218.

sion of Hindus.

Early in 1897, Swami Vivekananda established monasteries for religious meditations as well as missions for social service.<sup>4</sup> He toured all over India and delivered lectures preaching the doctrine of his great master Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Vivekananda's remarkable role in popularising Hinduism world wide through his eloquence can not be set aside. In India, the Theosophical Society was formed in Madras in 1882.<sup>5</sup> Madam Blavatsky and Annie Beasant were its leaders. Annie Beasant's propagation of its teachings had a considerable impact for she was a great scholar in the philosophies of religions and had high respect for Hinduism and India.

The British Indian Association founded on 29th October 1851, has an all India outlook from its very beginning. This was the result of the passion for political regeneration leading to the achievement of freedom. It was not only to safeguard the interests of India against the organised attacks of European community but also to represent Indian views to the Parliament on the eve of the renewal of the Charter of East India Company in 1853-Observes R.C. Majumdar and P.N. Chopra.<sup>6</sup> But soon the Association

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4. Ibid. p.220.

5. K. Damodaran, op.cit. pp.481-2.

6. R.C. Majumdar and P.N. Chopra, op.cit. p.235.

failed to keep pace with the nationalist spirit of the new generation and the Indian association, was started in 1875, of which Surendranath Banerjee, known as father of Indian nationalism,<sup>7</sup> was the heart and soul.<sup>8</sup> A national conference was arranged in 1883,<sup>9</sup> in which scholars from different parts of India participated. The second session of the national conference was held in Calcutta in 1885.<sup>10</sup> This conference was the Indian National Congress with the national conference merged and henceforth the Indian National Congress became the true representative of Indian political views.<sup>11</sup> By 1920, Congress became a well organised party,<sup>12</sup> with Mahatma Gandhi, who had taken its leadership a couple of years ago. Indian National Congress produced many towering personalities like Madana Mohana Malavya, Subhash Chandra Bose, Lala Lajpat Ray, Bipin Chandrapal, Sardar Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru, Gopalakrishna Gokhale and Dr. Rajendra Prasad.

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7. *Ibid.*, p.239.

8. *Ibid.*, p.236.

9. *Ibid.*, p.241.

10. *Ibid.*, p.241.

11. *Ibid.*, p.242.

12. N.E. Balaram, Introduction, Congressum Keralavum of A.K. Pillai, Prabhatam Printing and Publishing Company Ltd., Thiruvananthapuram, 86, p.23.

Balagangadhara Tilak, was prominent among them as he gave practical shape to the slogans of Swaraj, Swadeshi, National education and Boycott.<sup>13</sup> Mahatma Gandhi enunciated his famous doctrine of Non-violent non-co-operation. Accordingly Indians would boycott the British Govt. in all ways including giving up legal practices, boycotting government schools and colleges etc. On the other hand everyone would wear Khadar dress spun in the spinning wheel. The civil disobedience (violation of laws) was implemented by Gandhiji by about 1930.<sup>14</sup> The Quit India Movement took place in 1942.<sup>15</sup> As Dr. Radhakrishnan observes, “Gandhiji is a prophet of liberated life wielding power over millions of human beings by virtue of his exceptional qualities and heroism.”<sup>16</sup> Apart from Gandhiji, Aurobindo, the great thinker and philosopher can not be left out as he had published a detailed plan of what he called the non-co-operation, in almost exactly in the lines later followed by Gandhiji.<sup>17</sup> The Swadeshi Movement that started in Bengal, the Home rule movement of Tilak and the revolutionary movement of Subhash Chandra Bose need special

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13. M.L. Vidyarthi, India's Culture through Ages, Meenakshi Prakasan, Meerut 1970, p.407.

14. R.C. Majumdar and P.N. Chopra, op.cit., p.278.

15. Ibid., p.279.

16. Quoted by M.L. Vidyarthi, op.cit., p.410.

17. R.C. Majumdar and P.N. Chopra, op.cit., p.276.

mention in the freedom struggles. The formation of Communist Party in 1925, and the formation of Congress Socialist Party in 1935 need mention.<sup>18</sup> On July 18, 1947, the British Parliament passed the Indian Independence Bill and placed it on the statute book as "The Indian Independence Act 1947." India by this act was partitioned into two independent dominions known as India and Pakistan.<sup>19</sup> The Indian Constitution came into force only on 26th January 1950; though India had emerged as an independent nation on 15th August 1947. Naturally, ever since Independence India has been facing problems in political and social spheres; but their study is not attempted here.

The freedom movements had its impact on Kerala as well. Chettur Sankaran Nair, Dr.T.M.Nair, G.P. Pillai etc. used to attend the meetings of Indian National Congress. Around 1910, a district Congress Committee was formed in Kerala and K.P. Kesavamenon, the Secretary of Home Rule League became the Secretary of the District Congress Committee by 1916.<sup>20</sup> In 1917, C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer was elected its President.<sup>21</sup> The hard rules of the government made the people think for the need of a new one. Primary education was also a main theme in the

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18. A.K. Pillai, op.cit., p.29.

19. R.C. Majumdar, P.N. Chopra, op.cit., pp.283, 288.

20. A.K. Pillai, op.cit., p.293.

21. Ibid., p.298.

discussions. Meetings were held in Kozhikode, Manjeri and other places in turn. Manjeri Rama Iyer, K. Madhavan Nair etc. were the main members then. Dr. Annie Beasant's participation was a source of inspiration for them. The Malabar Kalapam connected with the Khilafat movement, took place in 1921, mainly in the areas around Malappuram.<sup>22</sup> It had effected the working of the Congress adversely. The role of news papers like Swadeshabhimani and Mathrubhumi in helping freedom struggles can not be underestimated. The Keralites too had actively participated in the salt movement at Payannur in 1931 under the leadership of Kelappan and Kurur Nilakanthan Nambudiripad, following the morals of Gandhiji.<sup>23</sup> In all the endeavours for freedom, Kerala too had reacted positively.

The social and political issues in connection with the freedom struggle did touch the hearts of the literary talents of that period, as well. Besides in the literatures of Swami Vivekananda, Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo, one can hear echoes of nationalism and patriotism in the lines of Sarojini Naidu, Rabindranath Tagore and Subramania Bharati. Even in Kerala, people in all walks of life were saturated with the urge of freedom.

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22. *Ibid.*, p.340.

23. *Ibid.*, p.396.

24. C. Sreekumaran, Contribution of Ottur Unni Nambudiripad to Sanskrit literature (M.Phil Thesis), submitted to Dept. of Sanskrit, Calicut University-1992, p.111.

The great poets like Vallattol sang for it. Ottur Unni Nambudiripad has even published a collection of poems, Vandemataram<sup>24</sup> in this spirit. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri's name is highly relevant in this situation. The famous Malayalam daily, Manorama, reports,<sup>25</sup> "He is a great patriot. Yesterday, he pointed out Arjuna as an ideal for those who are actively involved for the motherland. Bhagavan Krishna advises Arjuna to kill even Bhishmapitamaha and Drona, the great teacher, for protecting the motherland." Vazhakunnam preached in a touching manner to a large audience assembled in front of him at Chalappuram, Calicut. But unfortunately, this patriotic son of India breathed his last in 1946, unable to witness the long desired dawn of independence.

The bhakti movement did play a considerable role in bringing together the various sections of the society. P.K. Gopalakrishnan remarks regarding the leaders of bhakti movement, "In social aspects they emphasised the equality among men. They neglected the caste-system."<sup>26</sup> If Kabir, Nanak, Caitanya and Tukuram were the leaders of the bhakti movement in India, one can find the same tone in the famous Malayalam poet Ezhuttacchan also. Vazhakunnam too was a part and parcel of the same spirit of bhakti culture and heritage, but in a later generation. The com-

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25. See Bhaktasiromani, op. cit., p.237-8.

26. P.K. Gopalakrishnan, Keralattinte Samskarika Charitram, The State Institute of Languages, Trivandrum '84, p.445.

27. Ibid., p.445.

ment of Gopalakrishnan, "Almost all the bhakta poets have written in the language of the common man"<sup>27</sup> rightly befits Vazhakunnam as well. He enlightened the society around him with ancient stories and glory of Indian Culture. Through his selected path of bhakti, he tried to preach them solutions to all worldly problems. He wrote poems and dramas, as a part of it. In the words of Romila Thapar,<sup>28</sup> "The paucity of fresh literary source material would inevitably have led to a shift from the antiquarian interest in ancient past to a more analytical comprehension of it." Vazhakunnam seems to have revealed the ancient cultural wisdom through his literature knowing its relevance in this context. Vazhakunnam reminds one, of the great devotional poet Ramalingaswami, who lived in the 19th century near Chidambaram in Tamilnadu. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar observes about him, "A prophet of the dawn of renaissance India after the darkness and bleakness consequent on the trauma of British conquest and the subsequent national humiliation."<sup>29</sup> And as K. Damodaran observes,<sup>30</sup> "The bhakti movement, no doubt, contributed much to the national enlightenment of the people, the Hindus and Muslims

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28. Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History*, Orient Longman Limited, Hyderabad, '84, p.18.

29. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Ramalinga Swami - article, Devotional Poets and Mystics - Part II*, Publications Division, New Delhi, '91, p.125.

30. K. Damodaran, *op.cit.*, p.430.

in particular.” He adds, “By group prayers and the like it instilled the will power to do work. It raised them to a new level of consciousness and inspired them to do service.”<sup>31</sup> The social aspect of bhakti movements can not be neglected altogether.

The role of various centres of learning in producing great men, who contributed to the different disciplines of knowledge and literature is relevant. They have an important part in the social and cultural development of the people. As Dr.K.Kunjunni Raja observes, “The Kotunallur (Cranganore) was one of the most important seats of learning in the nineteenth century A.D., it produced several scholars who specialised in different Sastras.... The literary contribution from the members of the family is considerable.”<sup>32</sup> He mentions the names of Ramavarman, Koccunni Tampuran (1856-1926) and Kunnikkuttan Tampuran (1865-1913) in this context. Vazhakunnam too had studied Jyotisha from Valiya Koccunni Tampuran residing at Kodungallur.<sup>33</sup>

The famous historian A. Sreedharamenon observes,<sup>34</sup> “The all India reform movements like the Ramakrishna mission, the Theosophical society and the Arysamaj helped to create in the minds

31. Ibid., p.432.

32. Dr. K. Kunjunni Raja, The contribution of Kerala to Sanskrit Literature, Madras University, 1980, pp.247-250.

33. Bhaktasiromani (Mal. Work), op.cit., p.13.

34.A. Sreedhara Menon, A Survey of Social History, S. Viswanathan (Printer and Publishers) Pvt. Ltd., '91 p.324.

of Hindus in Kerala too a keen awareness of the evils of caste system.” In this context he points out the name of Swami Agamananda, Ramakrishna Ashram, Kaladi for his distinguished services in the eradication of caste barriers and the upliftment of Harijans.

The Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (S.N.D.P.) aimed at the social and spiritual regeneration of the Ezhavas, and the popularisation of the message of Sri Narayanaguru, came into existence on May 15, 1903<sup>35</sup> Dr. Palpu and the famous Malayalam poet Kumaranasan were active members of the Yogam. It had flourished due to the leadership of the famous social reformer Sri Narayanaguru, who declared, “One caste, One religion, One God for man.” Chattampi Swamikal, himself a Nair reformist, extended warm co-operation to Sri Narayanaguru, in the common cause of Hindu social and religious reformation. The Nair Service Society (N.S.S) aimed at the service of Nair community, as its very name suggests, was founded by Mannath Padmanabhan on October 31, 1914.<sup>36</sup> The activities of Yogakshema Sabha, formed in 1908,<sup>37</sup> for the social reformation of the Nambudiri Brahmins are discussed in detail in the coming pages of this chapter, for Vazhakunnam was a member of this community.

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35. *Ibid.*, p.325.

36. *Ibid.*, p.325.

37. *Ibid.*, p.326.

The Vaikkam Satyagraha led by K. Kelappan, K.P. Kesava Menon, T.K. Madhavan and the like, had its impact. Mannath Padmanabhan had organised a Savarnajatha of Caste Hindus supporting it.<sup>38</sup> At last, by the year 1928, the approach roads to all temples were thrown open to all the Hindus, irrespective of caste, in the whole of Travancore.<sup>39</sup> In this context, the role of C. Krishnan, the editor, Mitavadi, Calicut, who was highly inspired by the ideas of Gandhiji and Indian National Congress needs mention. In 1917, he had openly defied the order of Malabar Collector denying freedom to the members of Tiyya community and other backward classes in walking along the approach roads to the Tali temple, Calicut.<sup>40</sup>

The famous Guruvayur Satyagraha organised on November 1, 1931, could not fulfil its immediate objective as its leader K. Kelappan had to stop the indefinite fast initiated by him, as per the advice of Gandhiji on October 2, 1932.<sup>41</sup> A.K. Gopalan had sincerely participated in it as the volunteer captian. The Satyagraha did help to create a favourable climate in the eradication of untouchability.

The Sadhujana Paripalana Yogam was founded in 1907, by

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38. *Ibid.*, p.326.

39. *Ibid.*, p.327.

40. *Ibid.*, p.326.

41. *Ibid.*, p.327.

Ayyankali for rendering services to the Harijan community. The founder was recognised and nominated to the Srimulam Praja Sabha by the Government.<sup>42</sup> As a social reformer Sahodaran Ayyappan also deserves mention.

The Travancore Muslim Mahajana Sabha and Chirayinkil Taluk Muslim Samajam were founded by Vakkam Abdul Khadir Maulavi (1873-1932) who contributed considerably to the social and educational upliftment of the Muslims.<sup>43</sup>

Vazhakunnam however worked in a different area. A glance at the relevant social aspects of the Nambudiri Brahmins of the period is indispensable to trace the development of the man in Vazhakunnam.

Traditionally a Nambudiri is associated with his veda, gotra and acharas. Naturally he is brought up according to the restrictions laid down by these fundamental factors. By birth itself, one is automatically attached to the particular veda, which the members of the family follow. One cannot change the veda, whether it be Rigveda, Yajurveda or Samaveda. The acharas or rituals are decided with respect to the rules and regulations specific to the respective veda. Ancient Rishis Atri, Vasishta, Viswamitra, Kasyapa etc. have their descendents attached to the gotras named after them. The gotra system is still alive. Accordingly members

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42. *Ibid.*, p.329.

43. *Ibid.*, p.329.

of one gotra cannot marry another of the same gotra. Every Nambudiri family is thus attached to a particular gotra, that has its influence in deciding matrimonial links. Any male member has to undergo sixteen ritualistic ceremonies called the Shodasasamskaras.<sup>44</sup> According to V. Nagam Aiya "The ceremonies of the Nambudiris, as with the Brahmins elsewhere in India, begin with the very birth of the child. The first ceremony is the Jatakarmam ceremony (birth ceremony)."<sup>45</sup> But A.M. Krishna Sharma, an authority in the rituals of Nambudiris, clearly mentions in order Pumsavanam and Seemantham after Adhanam, to be observed before birth itself.<sup>46</sup> Even according to the sloka quoted by Kanippayyur, the order of observance of ceremonies tally with that of Krishna Sharma:

‘आधानं तनयस्य पुसवविधिः

सीमन्तजाताह्वयौ

....." <sup>47</sup>

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44. Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad, Preface, Kriyaratnamala of A.M. Krishnasharma, Panchangam Press, Kunnamkulam, 1989, p.14.

45. V. Nagam Aiya, The Travancore State Manual, Vol. II, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, '89, p.255.

46. A.M. Krishna Sharma, op.cit., p.18-21.

47: Kanippayyur Sankaran Nambudiripad, op.cit., p.14.

Among the sixteen ceremonies, Upanayana that takes place during the boyhood days is very important. William Logan states, "In the seventh year the boy is invested with the sacred thread (poonool) and his ears are bored. For three years he next leads a holy life and pays visits only to his father".<sup>48</sup> According to Kriyaratnamala, the best age for doing Upanayana is the eighth year, though it may be performed during 5th, 7th or 9th year.<sup>49</sup> As per Manusmr̥tiḥ the upper age limit for Upanayana for Brahmins is 16 years:<sup>50</sup>

‘आषोडशाद्ब्राह्मणस्य

सावित्री नातिवर्तते’

Upanayana is supposed to give the second birth (qualifying one to be called Dvija) owing to the study and practice of the veda concerned. However there are some Nambudiris called Oattillattavar, who do not study the vedas.<sup>51</sup>

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48. William Logan, Malabar, Vol. I, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1989, p.129.

49. A.M. Krishnasharma, op.cit., p.51.

50. Manusmr̥tiḥ (2,39), The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, Benaras, 1935, p.33.

51. V. Nagam Aiya, op.cit., p.251.

Vazhakunnam, after his upanayana ceremony, dedicated himself for getting by heart the vedas with Svara. The brothers of his father, Vasudevan Nambudiri and Nilakanthan Nambudiri gave him practice in vedic chanting, under the supervision of Kesavan Atitiripad, his grandfather.<sup>52</sup> He had also stayed in the Tirunavaya Math for four years to enhance his ability in 'Jata' and 'Ratha', the various vedic disciplines. By the excellence of his vedic mastery, he could win the most coveted first place in the vedic contest Jata, conducted as a part of the Katavallur Anyonyam.<sup>53</sup> Thus Vazhakunnam had now become a distinguished personality among the society of Vedic scholars.

Vazhakunnam's family was very strict in observing devotional practices. His grandfather Kesavan Atitiripad, a devotee of Guruvayurappa, would chant a sloka from Bhagavata and bow down 108 times daily.<sup>54</sup> Vazhakunnam's father Raman Atitiripad a Rigvedic scholar, had written a translation to the Bhagavadgita and Ekadesaskandha of Bhagavata.<sup>55</sup> Vazhakunnam had to chant the Panchakshara, three thousand times a day at the instance of his beloved mother.<sup>56</sup> To perform pujas in temples, to do ser-

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52. See Bhaktasiromani, op. cit., p.7.

53. Taccappilli Govindamenon, loc.cit., p.142.

54. Bhaktasiromani, op.cit., p.5.

55. Ibid., p.4.

56. Ibid., p.9.

vices connected with devotional matters, to get acquainted with temple routines and to attend the temple functions, formed part of the day to day duties of Malayalee Brahmins. Vazhakunnam too frequently visited the temples at Tiruvegappura, Kodungallur, Koodalmanikyam, Guruvayur etc. with intense devotion.

At this juncture a peep at the social conditions that prevailed among the Nambudiri Brahmins then is highly relevant.

Firstly, considering the ladies their social status was quite pitiable. They were denied modern education and free social mingling especially with the members of other communities. Very often, one had to be the second, third or fourth wife of the husband with an astonishing age difference. A Nambudiri lady was called *Antarjanam*, and she had to hide herself under the old type palm leaf umbrella, called *marakkuda*. She had no right even to cover her breasts. She would quite often be a prey for early marriage and her life after marriage would be further darkened by the dense smoke rising up from the dark old kitchen of her husband's house. V.T. Bhattathiripad, draws a realistic picture of a beautiful Nambudiri lady, *Ittichiri* by name, who had to sacrifice her life for one of the younger brothers of his father, "That pure unsmelt flower burned little by little in that husk-fire of male's dominance."<sup>57</sup> The marriage ceremony still prevailing as

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57. V.T. Bhattathiripad, Kannirum Kinavum, Best Books, Trichur, 1990, pp.65-66.

'Sarvasvadanam' can be traced to the ancient Hindu law.<sup>58</sup> If a Nambudiri lady failed to keep her strictly disciplined life, she had to face even the threat of Smarthavichara. It is one of the most cruel systems of enquiry in which a Nambudiri woman, whose chastity is suspected, is seriously examined. The committee of enquiry consists of a smartha or judge, two Mimamsakars (persons versed in law), one Akakkoyimma (regulator of order at the trial) and one Purakkoyimma (the representative of the sovereign). In all parts of Malabar except Travancore, the Smarta conducts the enquiry as the deputy of one of the six recognised Vaidikans. But in Travancore, where there is no Vaidikan, the Smarta's authority is supreme.<sup>59</sup> The woman if found guilty will be treated as an outcaste (Bhrastu). She will be excommunicated from the family and her social status may be degraded.

There are 64 rules of conduct for Hindus. "The Nambudiris follow all these 64 rules of conduct strictly to the very letter"<sup>60</sup> observes Nagam Aiya, enlisting them. Apart from these, Nambudiris had to observe all rules and regulations associated with the caste. A Nambudiri, who failed to keep these rules was degraded. If a Nambudiri commits a serious offence, he is also treated as an outcast as per the relevant clauses of the cast laws.

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58. K.P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1982, p.71.*

59. V. Nagam Aiyam, *op.cit.*, p.273.

60. *Ibid.*, p.267.

Only the eldest male member of the family could marry from the caste. The younger ones had to marry from other castes, and it was called Sambandham. V.T. Bhattathiripad in his autobiography has quoted the words of one of the characters of his drama, Adukkalayil ninnu Arangattekku, "I may be born as a bitch or a cat, but never as an Apphan in a Nambudiri community, if I have yet another birth."<sup>61</sup> These words of V.T. Bhattathiripad disclose briefly the sympathetic situations of the Apphan Nambudiris, constituting all those younger to the eldest members of the family. It was in 1908,<sup>62</sup> that the Nambudiri Yogakshema Sabha was formed for the renovation of Nambudiris. C.K. Nambudiri has written a detailed book<sup>63</sup> Nambudiri Yogakshemasabhayute munpum pinpum. He observes that its main aim at the time of formation was "to make developments in educational, moral, ritualistic, legal and financial matters."<sup>64</sup> This organisation was the first and foremost of its kind in India. As L.A. Krishna Iyer remarks:<sup>65</sup> "The Nambudiri Yogakshema Sabha advocated the

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61 V.T. Bhattathiripad, *V.T.yute Jeevitasmaranakal* (autobiography), National Book Stall, Kottayam, 1983, p.188.

62.T.Gopinath, 'Of Nambudiri stock,' *Indian Express Weekend* - 22 June 1991, p.1.

63.C.K. Nambudiri, *Nambudiri Yogakshemasabhayute Munpum Pinpum*, Panchamgam Press, Kummankulam, 1963.

64. *Ibid.*, p.11.

65. L.A. Krishna Iyer, *Social history of Kerala*, Vol.II, Book Centre Publications, Madras, 1970, p.48.

adoption of this reform” and he adds, “Kerala may rightly claim the position of being in the vanguard of social reform in India.”<sup>66</sup>

The Nambudiri youths of the time too had their role in the reformist movement. The Yuvajanasamgham emphasised more on the view that Nambudiris should not keep themselves separated from other castes of the society. Nambudiris should be more conscious of solving the social evils forgetting the differences in social status. They must be aware of their individual rights. The ladies should be educated. Untouchability has to be abolished.<sup>67</sup> Even the ladies had their role. The Antarjanasamajam too became active. They realised the need of jobs for ladies.<sup>68</sup>

The main literary output that arose in this line are Adukkalayil ninnu Arangattekkku, and Kannirum Kinavum of V.T. Bhattathiripad, Apphante Makal of Muttiringode Bhavatratan Nambudiri, etc. Vazhakunnam also contributed his mite by writing a community oriented novel, partly published in the Unni Nambudiri magazine (mentioned in Ch.VI). E.M.S. Nambudiripad, Pandam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Kurur Unni Nambudiripad, M.R. Bhattathiripad, Premji etc. also were in the forefront of this revolt. Parvati Nenminimangalam was a leader from the women's side.<sup>69</sup>

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66. Ibid., p.48.

67. V.T. Bhattathiripad, V.T.yute Jivitasmaranakal, op.cit., p.103.

68. C.K. Nambudiri, op.cit., p.41.

69. T. Gopinath, op.cit., p.iv.

In spite of the affluent status, the Nambudiris led a very simple, innocent and honest life. T. Gopinath observes that this community has not bred thieves and criminals. He quotes a case citing a judge who recorded "Nambudiris are not accustomed to tell lies."<sup>70</sup> V. Nagam Aiya remarks in his census report for 1891, "The Namburis (Nambudiris) are a good natured people, distinguished for their civility, hospitality and charities."<sup>71</sup> In the comparatively long passage, he observes that a Nambudiri's everyday life is "one of the simplest, quietest and best conducted."<sup>72</sup>

In the words of Mr. Fawcett,<sup>73</sup> "The moral element certainly enters largely into the life of the Nambutiri. And if it be true, as there seems little reason to doubt, that a religion may be classed high or low according as it does or does not influence the morals of a people, we must class, the religion of the Nambutiri high, for his whole life, his moral life, we will say is dominated by it. A peace loving people, and devoted to their religion, the Nambutiris are beyond doubt." He concludes, "Long may they be what they are, the only undisturbed vestiges of vedic brahmanism."

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70 Ibid., p.iv, III Column.

71. V. Nagam Aiya, op.cit., p.285.

72. Ibid., p.285.

73. Quoted by V. Nagam Aiya, Ibid., p.286.

The names of Kanippayyur Mana in Vastuvidya, Kattumadom, Suryakaladi etc. in Mantravada; Venmani, Ottur, Vazhakunnam etc. in poetry and Bhagavata lectures are a few from the list of contributors of Nambudiris to science, art and literature. The Brahmin community is solely responsible for bringing through ages the vedas in tact, through the oral medium.

Many of the desirable conditions of the community played a decisive part in the birth and growth of the poet in Vazhakunnam. Vazhakunnam too had the sense of humour which his father Raman Atitiripad exhibited. Njayath Balan has written a long essay on the sense of humour of Raman Atitiripad.<sup>74</sup> Vazhakunnam's sense of humour reverberated during his discourses. Patirisseri Damodaran Nambudiri quotes one of such discourses in which the audience could not control laughing for about five minutes continuously.<sup>75</sup>

Even now, there are many Nambudiri Brahmins, who are financially and socially backward. Ramesh Menon has drawn out a realistic picture in one of his published articles.<sup>76</sup> The

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74. Njayath Balan, Atiripadinte Podikkaikal, Sunday supplement to Malayala Manorama daily, dated 3.3.96, p.5.

75. Patirisseri Damodaran Nambudiri, Annathe Prasangam, Bhaktasiraomani, op.cit., p.125.

76. Ramesh Menon, Oru Samudayattinte Pathanam, India Today (Malayalam), 8-22 July, '91, Living Media Press, Tamil Nadu, pp.58-60

Yogakshemasabha has made considerable contributions to the social upliftment and modern education of the Nambudiris. But Vazhakunnam rendered his services in enlightening and enhancing the social contact among the communities. He did it diligently through his religious and spiritual discourses and public functions. This was possible as the people would forget differences of caste, position and the like when they mingled in devotional gatherings.

Vazhakunnam's lectures on Narayaniyam had been arranged on three consecutive days at Guruvayurappan Hall, Calicut. The famous critic and humorist M.R. Nair (Sanjayan) who had attended the talks on all the three days, seeing the thick croud remarked that it should have been arranged in the open air. He put a query in his own style, "who will give me the cost of 'pindathaila' to be bought for massaging the body crushed in the rush," Zamorin Raja of Kozhikode reveals this incident through his evocative words.<sup>77</sup> The social impact of Vazhakunnam's lectures can be understood from this context.

Swami Vivekananda addresses the upper class of India,<sup>78</sup> "Ay, on your bony fingers are some priceless rings of jewel treasured by your ancestors... (Now under the British rule) pass them

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77. Interview with P.K. Ettanunni Raja, the present Zamorin Raja of Calicut.

78. Quoted by Swami Vireswarananda, Religion and National Integration, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1986, p.13.

on to your heirs, ay, do it as quickly as you can” and he adds, “Let her (New India) arise-out of the peasant’s cottage, grasping the plough; out of the huts of the fisherman, the cobbler and the sweeper.” Vazhakunnam, a member of the Brahmin community, vigilantly implemented the message implied in these words by imparting the vedic wisdom permeated through the puranas to the heirs belonging to all sections of the society.

## CHAPTER III

### VAZHAKUNNAM AS A PROPAGATOR AND INTERPRETER OF SRĪMADBHĀGAVATAM

The most important role that Vazhakunnam played in his life is probably that of the propagator and interpreter of Srimadbhagavatam. In this respect he excelled all his predecessors. The noteworthy Bhagavata interpreter who preceded him was Kutallur Kunnikkavu Nambudiripad, an established Sanskrit scholar and grammarian who had even surprised the famous Kaikkulangara Rama Variyar, it is said, by explaining new and new unknown meanings to a given Sanskrit quotation. His scholarship and his deep devotion to Lord Guruvayurappa made his Bhagavata renderings heart-touching and appealing. Vazhakunnam excelled him in citing striking examples in beautiful and simple language quoting a wide range of poets like Vyasa, Valmiki, Tuncat Ezhuttacchan, Puntanam, Tagore and so on. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer observes<sup>1</sup> "His speech like the incessant flow of holy Ganga

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1. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer, KSC, Vol.V, Dept. of Publications, University of Kerala, Dec. 1965, pp. 253-254.

astonished the audience with its simplicity of language, lucidity of style, sweetness of imagination, melody and audibility of the words, appropriateness of expressions and actions.”

Vazhakunnam commanded the audience by his unique method of communication. Once while addressing a fairly good crowd at Tiruvegappura in 1096, he suggested to chant ‘Narayana’. But the people were not ready to respond at once. He turned back and pointing at the foliage at a distance requested them to resound the Lord’s name, perhaps reminding the answering by the tree on behalf of Sri Suka to his father’s call. At this stage all present there uttered loudly ‘Narayana’. This was the first incident of people obeying his command and this took place prior to his role as Bhagavata interpreter.<sup>2</sup> Later on, he had developed this capacity to such an extent that by a mere hint, people would readily respond by chanting the name of the Lord.

Ulloor has mentioned about the story telling ability of Vazhakunnam while he was in his boyhood.<sup>3</sup> Naturally his later mastery of the various techniques of addressing people was a due extension of this ability.

One feature of his narration which highly attracted the audience was his wonderful ability to portray living word pictures. He

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2. Ulloor, *ibid* p.254.

3. Ulloor, *ibid* p.252.

would make men visualise the various life situations of Lord Krishna. He would take his listeners to Dwaraka, Mathura, Vrindavana etc. and unveil the scenes of Krishna's sweet plays and rhythmic movements with the enchanting flute. K.P. Narayana Pisharoti says that seventy years ago when he was a boy he was fortunate to attend his satsanga at Guruvayur. He remembers having shed tears of ecstasy created by Vazhakunnam's touching narration.<sup>4</sup> Some would be led to self oblivion, some to tears, some to prostration and many to chanting the holy names of Krishna.

To the question as to how he could retain the Koottampala houseful at Trichur, Vazhakunnam replied, "Just as the little Krishna managed to contain the whole world in his tender mouth."<sup>5</sup> The great devotional poet and a contemporary Bhagavata expounder Ottur Unni Nambudiripad has remarked, "I have not so far witnessed any assemblage keeping so alert and closely attentive as in the case where Vazhakunnam was the exponent. Instead of falling down to the states of dream or sleep they would fly up into the supreme fourth state tureeya."<sup>6</sup>

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4. K.P. Narayana Pisharoti, *Bhaktasiromani Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri* (Mal.Article), *Bhaktapriya, Guruvayur Devasvom, Guruvayur*, Book V, Vol.II, 90, pp.15-18.
  5. Taccappilli Govindamenon, *op.cit.*, p.156.
  6. Ottur Unni Nambudiripad, preface, *Laghubhagavatam* (Bhasha) of Vazhakunnam, Mangalodayam, Trichur, 1944, p.iii.

It is interesting to note how Vazhakunnam was led to the seat of Bhagavata propagandist. He had been influenced by the penetrative Bhagavata discourse of Cheriya Koccunni Tampuran of Kodungallur and that had deeply impressed him. Following a twelve day long worship, Vazhakunnam was performing pradakshina at the Srikrishna temple at Guruvayur. An elderly bhakta approached him and asked certain doubts regarding the meaning of two slokas of Bhagavata. Vazhakunnam who was then near Lord Ayyappa's idol sat there itself and quenched the thirst of the person. It was Nesseri Nambudiripad who had asked the doubts. But as the explanation proceeded to about two hours, a good number of devotees had joined him in getting enlightened in the matter. Vazhakunnam was so much absorbed that he was not aware of the crowded space or the prolonged time. The devotees requested him many a time to bless them with Bhagavata interpretations on a regular basis. Thus Vazhakunnam became the sole example of a spiritual orator, installed by the people on his venerable seat.<sup>7</sup> His father Raman Atitiripad, whole heartedly blessed him and persuaded him to proceed in the line. Once he dissuaded his son from the service in his fatal bed asking him to continue his Bhagavata services which would be beneficial to a large number of people.<sup>8</sup>

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7. Personal interview with Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad, Direct disciple of Vazhakunnam.

8. Taccappilli Govindamenon, *op.cit.* p.161.

Vazhakunnam had a commendable talent in expressing deep philosophical thoughts through the description of Krishna's plays and plans. This can not be better described than by quoting the vedic scholar and Bhakta poet Ottur Unni Nambudiripad, "The spaceless, timeless, actionless, formless Brahma fails to keep quiet in front of this optimistic poet. If Brahma is found motionless, Vazhakunnam would adorn the crest with a beautiful peacock feather, supply the hands with a flute, embellish the waist with a jingling ornament, beautify the feet with anklets, induce laughter and if necessary provoke by promising Ambalappuzha palpayasam enough and more. He would persuade to take steps and dance."<sup>9</sup> Vazhakunnam would thus play the role of a stage manager, arranging for Brahma to enter into flesh and blood taking the character of the enchanting Krishna, with whom the mass would converse.

It is interesting to note that he did never resort to the custom of Bhagavata Saptaha, as that would not provide him with sufficient time for his detailed exposition. Instead he would finish Bhagavata by 15, 18, 21 or 41 days. He has read Bhgavatam at Madras, Bombay, Trivandrum, Tripunithura, Trichur etc. in addition to Guruvayur.

It cannot be denied that the bhakta flourishes by the grace of Bhagavan and Bhagavan flourishes by the praise of bhakta. This truth can be evidenced by taking the case of Vazhakunnam and

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9. Ottur Unni Nambudiripad, op.cit. p.xix.

Guruvayurappa. Vazhakunnam was little known before his association with Srikrishna temple, Guruvayur. It was from this centre that his devotion, his literary talents, his tendency for recitation, his eloquence, his political aptitude, all got well developed and sublimated. His contact with the numerous bhaktas, who frequented the temple, nourished and boosted his devotional attitude. For improving the literary talents he got the vast and beautiful arena of Krishna's story. The variety of situations and topics, the curiosity of attentive assemblages, and the auspicious premises of the temple awakened the orator in Vazhakunnam. The temple atmosphere resonant with the beautiful laudatory verses of Melputtur, simple lines of Puntanam, and the ever repeated Bhagavata and above all the taintless form that shone in the shrine had their influence in the making of the poet. Guruvayur too was benefitted by him. People thronged again and again to get themselves blessed and satisfied by witnessing the Lord and drinking the sweet nectar that flowed from the master story-teller. Bhagavata received larger acceptance and popularity. The Bhagavata text was even identified as an alternative form of Bhagavan; Poojas were initiated with Bhagavata substituted for Bhagavan. Guruvayur became a dynamic centre of devotion with involvement of larger number of devotees. Gradually Guruvayur became famous as a centre of bhakti cult tending to excel other well known centres of bhakti like Ambalappuzha, Trichambaram, Kodungallur and the like.

Bhagavata interpretations of Vazhakunnam had also the reproductive aspect resulting in a new generation of fresh Bhagavata

interpreters. The influence of the same was deeper than the level of appreciation. It penetrated into the depths of certain creative minds, that emerged themselves as a galaxy of Bhagavata interpreters with Vazhakunnam at its centre. Of them the names of Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad, Tottam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Venmani Paramesvaran Nambudiripad, Patirisseri Damodaran Nambudiri, and Nenminimangalam Vasudevan Nambudiri, are worth mentioning. All his disciples have been traversing the path in the light of Vazhakunnam, the torch bearer. Even after the demise of Vazhakunnam, his disciples were able to maintain their heights attracting devotees around them. They were also spreading the message of Bhagavata from different centres in Kerala and outside. A subsequent array of Bhagavata preachers like Venmani Vishnu, Venmani Krishnan Nambudiripad, Tottam Krishnan Nambudiri and so on have been playing their role in continuation. All these Bhagavata expounders in turn have been doing their best to the noble cause of increasing the number of devotees and spreading far and wide the fame of Guruvayur temple. Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad, the direct disciple of Vazhakunnam did settle permanently in the vicinity of the Guruvayur temple.

It was Vazhakunnam who initiated Ottur Unni Nambudiripad in conducting the public exposition of Bhagavata,<sup>10</sup> at Guruvayur temple. It is noteworthy that Vazhakunnam pointed out to Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri that as a beginner he should recite the text

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10. Swami Tapasyananda, Sriramakrsnakarnamrtam of Ottur Unni Nambudiripad, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras 1975, p.iv.

loudly; the ignorant hearers would then be simply attracted by it and scholars would come to give proper suggestions as and when required.<sup>11</sup>

It will not be out of place here to note that eminent scholars and poets have commended Vazhakunnam's spiritual exhortations. Mahakavi Ullor S. Paramesvara Iyer used to listen to him during the latter's sojourn at Thiruvananthapuram.<sup>12</sup> His high appreciation has already been quoted above. Mahakavi Vallattol Narayana Menon equated the depth of Vazhakunnam's knowledge and status as Bhagavata interpreter with those of Kutallur Kunnikkavu Nambudiripad.<sup>13</sup> K. Vasudevan Moosad (K.V.M) states that Vazhakunnam's speech bringing out the subtle and delicate meaning of Bhagavata attracted orthodox and fashionable people belonging to various sections of the society.<sup>14</sup> Vatakkumkur Raja Raja Varma Raja summarises the speech of Vazhakunnam thus: "He used short stories, legends, humour, and quotations

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11. Unnikrishnan Puthur, Tirunamacharyan Anjam Tirumeni, Mathrubhumi, Calicut 1, 1988, p.121.
  12. Taccappilli Govindamenon, op.cit. p.157.
  13. Quoted by Vasudevan Nenminimangalam, preface Tiruvullakavile Ormakkurippukal of Vazhakunnam, Mangalodayam, Trichur, 1939, p.i.
  14. K. Vasudevan Moosad, preface, Vasudevakarnamrtam., Mangalodayam, Trichur, 1939 p.1.

from great poets, wherever necessary to raise the audience to a blissful atmosphere....His speech was beautified by means of bhakti, prayer, exhortation, supporting lines from ancient poets, discussions regarding tendencies of the current world, adoration of great teachers of the past, and traditional sayings.”<sup>15</sup> Venmani Krishnan Nambudiripad, the well recognised Bhagavata scholar of the present day has described Vazhakunnam as the reverberator of Bhagavata.<sup>16</sup> Unnikrishnan Puthur, the famous Malayalam writer observes that Vazhakunnam, had never discarded rational thinking even when he traversed the path of bhakti.<sup>17</sup>

If Vazhakunnam’s tongue gave its lifelong service for the propagation of the Lord’s fame his pen has been effecting the same even after his demise. His simple and detailed commentary of Bhagavata, (incomplete and partly published) is worth mentioning.

Vazhakunnam was awarded a couple of veera shrinkhalas by the senior Tampuram of Tripunithura Kovilakam, at a valedictory

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15. Vatakkumkur RaJa Raja Varma Raja, Kerala Sahitya Charitram (Charchayum Pooranavum) Part II, Mangalodayam, Trichur 1968, pp. 505-507.

16. Venmani Krishnan Nambudiripad, Krpastotram of Vazhakunnam, Gita Press, Thrichur, 1976, p.5.

17. Unnikrishnan Puthur, Guruvayurappante Chuttum Orotta pradakshinam (Mal.article). Mathrubumi Guruvayur supplement, Mathrubhumi, Calicut, Feb.1962, p.41.

session of a series of spiritual discourses based on Bhagavata. (But he offered these ornaments one to Nelluvail Krishna temple and the other to Tonnallur temple). There he had a very grand and extraordinary send off. He was seated in an adorned chariot drawn by two horses and followed by a vast crowd accompanied by sounds of musical instruments.<sup>18</sup>

Ravi Varma Valiya Tampuran of Cochin palace sanctioned for him an honorarium of Rs.20 per month.<sup>19</sup> Vazhakunnam was also awarded the title Bhaktasiromani along with a cash prize<sup>20</sup> of Rs.100 in the year 1122.

Vazhakunnam had tremendous faith in Bhagavata including its healing power. He prescribed a Bhagavata Saptaha to be conducted by Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad at Guruvayur as a remedy for the mental problems of a poor Nambudiri of Kulasserri Mana. This was performed and the victim was completely relieved of his problems.<sup>21</sup>

Ottur Unni Nambudiripad has poetically summarised Vazhakunnam's assimilation of Bhagavata, stating that he has

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18. Taccappilli Govindamenon, op.cit. pp. 154-155.

19. Ullor op.cit. 250-256.

20. Taccappilli Govindamenon, op.cit. p.168.

21. Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad, Personal Diary (unpublished).

become identical with Bhagavata and that Bhagavata would resound from every cell of his body.<sup>22</sup> Vazhakunnam had been a recognised Bhagavata interpreter since about 1920. This substantiates Ottur's view<sup>23</sup> that Vazhakunnam started his Bhagavata exposition 24 years before 1119.

The lasting influence of Bhagavata exhortation made the devotees of Guruvayur accept Vazhakunnam as an exalted figure. The nearest north western pillar to the inner shrine of the Srikrishna temple bears Vazhakunnam's figure sculptured on its eastern side and his inspiring portrait has been installed at the temple premises. Again as a relic, a small sealed box has been kept in safe custody at Guruvayur Kootampala, which is supposed to contain many documentary evidences connected with Vazhakunnam. The present day generation keeps the memory of Vazhakunnam alive by arranging the Vazhakunnam Memorial Bhagavata Saptaha at the Guruvayur Kootampala during the first week of the month of Karkidakam (Malayalam era), every year.

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22. Ottur Unni Nambudiripad, op.cit. p.xxii.

23. Ottur Unni Nambudiripad, ibid., p.i.

## SANSKRIT WORKS OF VAZHAKUNNAM

Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri has to his credit six published works in Sanskrit. They are Krpastotram, Laghuramayana, Laghubhagavatam, Bhagavatastava, Sastrastuti and Devistava. Vatakkumkur Raja Raja Varma Raja has aptly appreciated the sweetness of his Sanskrit works while praising his ability in writing poems in both the languages - Sanskrit and Malayalam.<sup>1</sup>

### KRPASTOTRAM<sup>2</sup>

The book contains 249 simple verses written in Anushtup metre. Each verse is a prayer to Lord Guruvayurappa, the deity of Srikrishna temple, Guruvayur. As the name of the work suggests the work is an appeal to the Lord to shower Kripa (mercy). Many a time, one finds Vazhakunnam calling Lord Guruvayurappa

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1. Vatakkumkur Raja Raja Varma Raja, Kerala Sahitya Charitram (Charchayam Puranavum), Part - II, Magalodayam, Trichur 1968, p.505.
  2. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Krpastotram, Gita Press, Trichur, April 1976.

and addressing him. This style of the poet reminds one of Narayaniyam of Melputtur, who addresses Lord Guruvayurappa directly. At the beginning of the work itself, he requests the Lord to shower blessings for the successful completion of the work.<sup>3</sup>

‘लक्ष्मीजानेतवकृपापीयूषशरणस्य मे  
तत् स्तोत्रनिर्माणविधौ साहाय्यं कर्तुमर्हसि’

In this context he mentions Kuchela, Vasudeva, Devaki and the gopis who were fortunate enough to win the grace of Lord Krishna.<sup>4</sup> In the stanzas that follow he points out that Putana and other demons like Sakatasura were also blessed by the Lord and given salvation even though they had tried to kill him. The poet projects the wide range of the Lord’s mercy that flows beyond all limitations. He illustrates it taking situations connected with the admirable life of little Krishna at the abode of Nandagopa. The bhakta poet observes that it is due to Lord’s mercy that the Kalindi flows, the Vrindavana shines with beauty, and the Govardhana mountain remains with its head high.<sup>5</sup>

Quite often we find Vazhakunnam asking the Lord to shower that grace on him:<sup>6</sup>

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3. Ibid. Stanza 3, p.1.
  4. Ibid. pp.12,13.
  5. Ibid. p.17.
  6. Ibid. Stanza: 27, p.16.

‘ययैवेतानि कर्माणि कृतानि भवता हरे !

सा कृपा नन्यशरणे क्रियतां मय्यचञ्चला

Again in another verse:<sup>7</sup>

‘तत्र त्वं कृपया नीतो यया माधव सांप्रतं

सासदा खेलतां दीने तदेकशरणे मयि

The poet Vazhakunnam continues depicting the Lord's Kripa by illustrating the stories associated with Lord Krishna.

Each sloka is appended with a simple precise and clear translation in Malayalam prose written by Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad, one of the direct disciples of Vazhakunnam. This helps and attracts the Malayalee devotees considerably.

### LAGHURAMAYANAM<sup>8</sup>

The work Laghuramayanam contains 644 slokas with 77 slokas in Balakanda, 119 slokas in Ayodhyakanda, 75 slokas in the Aranyakanda, 67 slokas in the Kishkindhakanda, 68 slokas in the Sundarakanda, 128 in the Yuddhakanda and 110 in the Uttarakanda. Each sarga of Valmikiramayana is abridged into each sloka of Laghuramayanam by Vazhakunnam. The poet had

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7. Ibid. Stanza 32, p.17.

8. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Laghuramayanam Norman Printing Bureau, Calicut, 1966.

initially reduced the 68 sargas of the Sundarakanda into 68 slokas. It was the appreciation, warm welcome and encouragement from the benefitted readers and bhaktas that instilled enthusiasm in him to follow up the process for the remaining sargas as well, and this resulted in the work Laghuramayanam. Vazhakunnam's work does fulfill its aim. He has written it for the use of devotees who are busy with their wordly problems. Tattayoor has written the Malayalam meanings in precis form, appended to each of the slokas. The fact that the poet had taken not even a month for completing the work, as pointed out by Tattayoor at the beginning of the work, really deserves admiration. The Malayalam work Ramakathasudha is a work of the same poet written earlier exactly in the same manner. The main difference between the two being the difference in the language of their composition. One has been written for those with knowledge in Sanskrit language where as the other particularly to quench the thirst of Malayalee devotees.

Vazhakunnam reduces precisely the voluminous Ramayana of Valmiki, following his footsteps very closely without deviations. His effort in this regard is sincere and effective.

### LAGHUBHAGAVATAM<sup>9</sup>

The book Laghubhagavatam consists of two works of Vazhakunnam - Laghubhagavatam and Bhagavatastavah. The

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9. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Laghubhagavatam Mangalodayam, Trichur, 1958.

work Laghubhagavatam consists of 335 slokas excluding the four mangalaslokas given at the beginning. Each sloka is the summary of the corresponding adhyaya of the Srimadbhagavatam. The first six skandhas are written in Sragdhara whereas the remaining in Sardoolavikridita metre. It was the constant need and request of the Malayalee devotees that materialised as Laghubhagavatam (bhasha), a translation of this work into Malayalam by the poet himself. Vazhakunnam has clearly mentioned that he had written the Sanskrit work Laghubhagavatam originally.<sup>10</sup> The master poet, by having spent a life of commitment for propagation of Bhagavata, interpretation of Bhagavata and doing service by way of enlightening the common mass with the principles, stories and situations of Bhagavata is really the most appropriate and competent person to write Laghubhagavatam, which he has proved through the lines of his work.

### BHAGAVATASTAVAH<sup>11</sup>

It is a small stotra work of eleven stanzas. This has been included and published along with the Sanskrit work Laghubhagavatam. This work has been mentioned in the book

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10. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Laghubhagavatam (Moolam-Bhasha), Kamalalaya Printing Works, Thiruvananthapuram 1962, p.3.

11. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Laghubhagavatam, Mangalodayam, Trichur, 1958, pp.73,74.

Bhaktasiromani (life and reminiscences of Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri) along with other works of the poet as his contribution to Sanskrit literature.<sup>12</sup> As the name suggests it is a short appraisal of Bhagavata. The poet looks at the merits of Bhagavata from different angles. He tries to analyse and illustrate his ideas for the common man. His competence is justified by the verses. Throughout the work the poet is seen addressing Bhagavata as though considering it not as imaginary but as real, not as theoretical but as practical. He is not merely trying to visualise but looking at it as a divine incarnation. In this aspect this stotra stands different and noteworthy.

### SASTRSTUTIH<sup>13</sup>

Sastrstutih is a short Sanskrit book consisting of twenty one beautiful slokas of Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri. The slokas are written as prayers to Lord Ayyappa. The short meanings of the slokas written by Venmani (Kuttan) Parameswaran Nambudiripad given as appendices corresponding to the respective slokas are appropriate in the sense that they help the common man. He has in his preface to the book said that this is one of the best available works on Lord Ayyappa. He says that this work helps the devotees of the deity Dharmasastha of Sabarimala

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12. See Bhaktasiromani, op.cit, initial pages.

13. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Sastrstutih, Gnanodayam Press, Kalady, 1926.

as well as of Tiruvullakkavu.<sup>14</sup> So by having written this work Vazhakunnam has fulfilled a long felt need of the devotees of Ayyappa. The slokas have been written in various metres. The first and the last slokas are rather lengthy compared to the rest. Vazhakunnam has clearly specified his intention of praying Lord Ayyappa. The poet's request is to bless him to have bhakti in Lord Krishna.

### DEVISTAVAH<sup>15</sup>

This short work in Sanskrit by the poet Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri is on Bhagavati. It has been published 20 years after its composition.<sup>16</sup> All the nine slokas are comparatively long ones. In each of the slokas Vazhakunnam calls the deity Bhagavati by different names. He wishes to address her along with Lalithasahasranama chanting. His main prayer to her is to develop Krishnabhakti in him. This answers the natural doubt why Vazhakunnam, an ardent devotee of Lord Krishna prays to the deity Bhagavati. Each sloka competes with the other in beauty and poetic excellence.

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14. Venmani (Kuttan) Parameswaran Nambudiripad, preface, ibid opening page.

15. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Devistavah, Norman Printing Beareau, Calicut, 1965.

16. Venmani Paramesvaran Nambudiripad, preface, Ibid. p.1.

## UNPUBLISHED WORKS

Out of the manuscript sources, it is seen that Vazhakunnam has written some Sanskrit works, which have not seen light. The unpublished Sanskrit works of Vazhakunnam are:

1. Gopalacintamani
2. Rukmini (II Part)
3. Marutesagopikagitam
4. Sandesacintamani
5. Jayatitedhikam

A brief study with appreciation of these unpublished works has been included in the ensuing chapter.

CHAPTER V

AN APPRECIATION OF THE  
SANSKRIT WORKS

**KRPASTOTRAM<sup>1</sup>**

India did have a long line of saints and mystics, who got immersed in the depths of wisdom of the ancients and came out with ideas and truths to enlighten their fellowmen. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri rightly deserves to be included as one among them. He lived with a purpose and that makes him different from the common man. He dedicated his life for propagating Krishnabhakti according to his own views and plans. He had the courage to dream and also the enthusiasm to turn that dream into reality. He was a great man in the sense that he gave life a meaning and worked for the fulfilment of his ideas. And as Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has pointed out,<sup>2</sup> “The truly great are not the men of wealth, of possessions, not men who gain name and fame, but those who testify to the truth in them and refuse to compromise, whatever be the cost. They are determined to do what they

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1. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Krpastotram, Gita Press, Trichur, April 1976.
  2. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Living with a purpose, Orient Paperbacks, New Delhi, 1977, p.7.

consider to be right. We may punish their bodies, refuse them comforts, but we cannot buy their souls, we cannot break their spirits. Whoever possesses this invulnerability of spirit even to a little extent deserve our admiration.”

One who examines closely the sayings, writings and activities of such great persons, will easily realise that there is no interest for personal gain, longing for physical happiness or such selfish motives in them. Kṛpastotram can rightly be treated as an example of such selfless, sublime and spiritually elevating prayer. As the poet begs the Lord to shower mercy on him, the title is justified. Each verse is either on the greatness of Lord Guruvayurappa or a prayer to the Lord to help him gracefully out of the worldly miseries.

The very first sloka is noteworthy as the poet is seen describing Ahanta (Ego) and Mamata (Attachment) as the chains of Maya. The novelty of outlook exhibited by the poet catches special attention of the readers.

“अहन्ताममतारूपशृङ्खलाभ्यामविद्यया

बद्धोपि नैव शोचामि कृपांशृण्वन् मुकुन्द ते”<sup>3</sup>

Here his optimistic attitude and firm belief in Lord Guruvayurappa is evident. But for the Lord’s mercy, the poet’s life would be miserable and worthless. This idea is comparable

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3. Vazhakunnam, op.cit. p.1.

with that of Melputtur Narayana Bhattathiri, who remarks:<sup>4</sup>

“कष्टा ते सृष्टिचेष्टा बहुतर-  
भवखेदावहा जीवभाजाम्”

in the opening lines of one of his famous slokas in Narayaniyam. In the same sloka he asks how without living in this world can Lord Guruvayurappa be seen, heard and enjoyed blissfully.

Vazhakunnam keeps up the nature of Sanskrit poets, who pray God for the successful completion of their works. In the beginning of the work, the poet prays Guruvayurappa to help him by guiding his intellect and words.

“तथा नयच बुद्धिं मे  
गिरं च मधुसूदन”<sup>5</sup>

The depth of his devotional attitude and confidence in Lord Krishna is evident as he says that it is due to the mercy of the Lord that Vasudeva-Devaki couple was blessed. Again it is due to the Lord's mercy that Kalindi broke into two to help Vasudeva going with his son. The Lord's grace was showered even on the fearful demons camouflaged to kill him.

Throughout the pages of the work, Vazhakunnam continues

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4. Melputtur Narayana Bhattathiri, Narayaniyam I,7.

5. Vazhakunnam, op.cit. verse 4, p.1.

his poems of appreciation of Lord Krishna's mercy, whom he considers as the almighty God. It will be interesting to look at the lines of William Blake, a western poet, who sings in his own style, on the mercy of God.<sup>6</sup>

“For Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love  
Is God, our father dear

....

Where Mercy, Love, Pity dwell  
There God is dwelling too.”

Both Vazhakunnam and William Blake emphasise the mercy of God, though the languages they used are different. The striking resemblance in the ideas of the poets hints at their universal appeal beyond time and space.

Vazhakunnam's ability in analysing objects and situations microscopically is worth mentioning. For example Lord Krishna's eyes are compared to the lotus flowers, and nose to the thila flower. The hair curls that beautify the forehead adds lusture to his enchanting smile.<sup>7</sup>

In the eye of the bhakta poet Vazhakunnam, all grades of

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6. Quoted by K.Chellappan, Tagore Bharathi and T.S. Eliot: Towards Creative Unity, Annamalai University, 1987, p.47.

7. Vazhakunnam, op.cit. verse 15, p.14.

living organisms are seen to be Krishna oriented. In other words, Lord Krishna caused a harmonious intermingling of all layers of life around him. The beautiful garden Vrindavana enriched by the plays of Lord Krishna, is described by the poet in flying colours. The plays of the gopas, the smooth flow of river Kalindi, the thick vegetation, the dances of the peacocks, the enchanting movement of the swans, etc. add to the attractive landscape. In a devotee's viewpoint, the respectable and sacred Vrindavana is purified completely by the very touch of the Lord. The hills, the animals, the creepers, birds, trees, are all blessed and glorified.<sup>8</sup>

The poet's mastery in the making of verses can be observed in the following stanza of Vazhakunnam.<sup>9</sup>

“नारदेन पूरा नीतौ वृक्षतां यक्षबालकौ  
विनीतौ भवता भूयो विनीतौ रूपमात्मनोः”

The poet has condensed in this single verse, the story of Nalakoobera and Manigreeva, who were first transmigrated into trees and later emancipated into their original form.

Again, the connotations of the word ‘विनीतौ’ are interesting. Firstly it means ‘विनयान्वितौ’ and secondly ‘विशेषेण नीतौ’. The scholar poet applies his grammatical scholarship appropriate to the context.

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8. Ibid, verses 28-33, p.17

9. Ibid, verse 26, p.16.

Vazhakunnam is like a teacher who dedicated his life to teach the lessons of Krishnabhakti to the society around him. He illustrates the topic dealt with stories and examples, wherever necessary. For example, on one of the occasions he mentions that the ladies of Vraja were ideal characters of bhakti and hence could win Krishna's blessings. The Lord not only stole butter from their houses, but also their hearts. And as a result they forgot everything else, and witnessed his plays.<sup>10</sup>

The poet's employment of alamkaras is striking and relevant to the situation. In the stanza that follows, he makes use of virodhabhasa in narrating Yasoda who tied Krishna, the one who unties the chains of the people.

“बबन्धोलूखले हन्त  
भवन्तं बन्धमोचनम्”<sup>11</sup>

The poet says that the sweet music flowing spontaneously from the flute of Lord Krishna, made the earth cool and sanctified Vrindavana. Vazhakunnam's verse is also sweet and beautiful as his imagination.<sup>12</sup>

“वेणुनादेन भुवनं गतःशिशिरयन् वनं  
उदञ्चद्रजसा कुर्वन् पावनं काननान्तरम्”

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10. *Ibid*, verses 21,22, p.15.

11. *Ibid*, verse 25, p.16.

12. *Ibid*, verse 39, p.19.

The simple and pleasing verse appeals to the hearts of not only a devotee but also any sahridaya.

The poetic talent in Vazhakunnam enables him to describe any context attractively whether it be spiritual, philosophical or mythological. The poet draws the picture of Lord Krishna, jumping as the monkeys, singing as the cuckoos and running in the shadows of the flying birds. The poet here succeeds in describing the plays of little children. The stanza can also be taken as an example of svabhavokti.<sup>13</sup>

“प्लवनैः कोकिलारावैः पक्षिच्छायानुधावनैः  
क्रीडन्तमेवं त्वां बाला अनुचक्रुः परे यथा”

Vazhakunnam's pen has proved its ability to colour not only spiritual themes but also other heart touching scenes. He has absorbed India's cultural heritage, puranic legends, and Bhagavata tradition and has restructured them in his own poetry in fresh and lucid style. The language Sanskrit loses its rigidity and seems flexible in the hands of the master poet. The poet has enriched Sanskrit literature and has clearly demonstrated that simple ideas can well be expressed in Sanskrit language. The following verse can be taken as an example.<sup>14</sup>

“एवंविधानि कर्माणि मंगलानि यया भवान्  
करोति कर्णरम्याणि हृद्यानि जगदीपते”

13. Ibid, verse 40, p.19.

14. Ibid, verse 59, p.24.

The great scholar devotee A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada has authoritatively remarked that Lord Krishna is attainable through three different methods- the empiric process of philosophical speculation, meditation according to mystic yoga system and devotional service.<sup>15</sup> Each stotra of Kṛpastotram suggests that Vazhakunnam emphasised the third path. He did devotional service by explaining relevant sweet stories of Lord Krishna which he found to be contributing to the devotional effect. The poet throws himself into the vast ocean of bhakti and comes up with valuable pearls to be distributed in the society around him.

The master artist creates word pictures of anything significant around him, whether it be of man, landscape or incident. He thus hints by a few touches, what others fail to express by elaborate explanations. For example in the following words:<sup>16</sup>

“ततः कालियसर्पस्य  
फणमण्डलमण्डपे  
.....  
.....”

the poet describes the rhythmic dance of little Krishna on the head of the dreadful serpent Kaliya. Kaliya's head is compared to a dance stage. The jingling ornaments provide the musical instru-

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15. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada, Teachings of Lord Caitanya, The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, Bombay, 1980, p.69.

16. Vazhakunnam, op.cit. verse 63, p.25.

ments for the rhythmic dance of little Krishna. The poet's pen pictures are also melodious and rhythmic.

The bhakta poet realises that Lord Krishna is the master of everything - riches, strength, fame and beauty. To show that he has not mistaken, he characterises Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna, who excels Cupid in charm is eagerly awaited by the damsels of Vraja.<sup>17</sup> His wonderful flute that attracts all living beings mobile or immobile, was remembered by the gopis, in his absence.<sup>18</sup>

“यातेकथंचित् भगवन् प्रभाते त्वयि काननं  
शृण्वन्त्यो मुरलीनादं तव गोप्योभिरेमिरे”

The depth of the poet's intense desire for Lord Krishna is revealed in the following lamentation to the Lord.<sup>19</sup>

“यस्य मे पादकमलं केवलं शरणं तव  
तस्मिन् मयि दयां कर्तुं मा मा कुरु विलंबनम्”

He confirms that there is no other solace but Krishna, to save him out of the wordly turmoils. He does not hesitate to say his opinion frankly that all the relatives including wife and children are only enemies in the devotional path.

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17. *Ibid*, verse 65, p.25.

18. *Ibid*, verse 67, p.26.

19. *Ibid*, verse 72, p.27.

“पुत्रमित्रकलत्राख्यैः शत्रुभिस्त्वत्पदांबुजात्  
पातालेपात्यमानं मां दययोद्धर्तुमर्हसि” 20

Vazhakunnam, in his Kṛpastotram has consciously made use of words that can easily be understood by the Malayalees.

“सन्तापविषवृक्षाणां मूलोन्मूलनसाधनं  
कथामृतकुठारं च देहि वातालयेश्वर” 21

One may even doubt whether this is a Sanskrit verse or a Malayalam verse; there Vazhakunnam has purposefully used the word ‘कुठारम्’, familiar even to an uneducated Malayalee. The broad and sincere desire of the scholar poet to enlighten the Malayalees deserves mention.

Vazhakunnam is a keen observer and lover of nature. This is evident in his description of Yamuna, with fertile banks of thick vegetation. The exquisite beauty of nature, says the poet, is enjoyed even by Lord Krishna, who sits on its banks playing his flute:<sup>22</sup>

“चन्द्रिकाधवले रम्ये मन्दमारुत शीतले  
कलिन्दकन्याकल्लोलमालातल्लजभूषिते

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20. Ibid, verse 73, p.27.

21. Ibid, verse 75, p.27.

22. Ibid, verses 101-103, pp.33,34.

कल्पवृक्षगणाकीर्णे चञ्चीरकरवाञ्छिते  
 हंसकोकिलसंगीते नीलकण्ठनटाश्रिते  
 एवंभूततटे कल्पवृक्षमूले सुविष्टरे  
 सुखनिषण्णः प्रजगौ वेणुना मधुरं भवान्”

The surroundings of Yamuna are dense with Kalpavrukshas and the atmosphere is saturated with the sweet sounds of swans and cuckoos. The peacocks select the place for performing dances. The music flowing out of Lord Krishna increases the depth of beauty. The beautiful scene seems original in the sharp word photograph of this nature poet.

Vazhakunnam becomes eloquent on the magical flute of the Lord, telling that the ladies of Vraja were all the more enchanted by its sweet musical tone,<sup>23</sup> Sage Garga goes a step further and states that even the trees shed tears of joy experiencing it:<sup>24</sup>

“सजलत्वं च तरवः”

The great poet Rabindranath Tagore looks at it empathetically.<sup>25</sup>

“My heart is like a flute he had played on  
 If ever it fall into other hands

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23. *Ibid*, verse 104, p.34.

24. Quoted by C. Krishnan Nambudiri, Vanaparvam (Malayalam essays of Scholars), Thapasya, Calicut-1, p.48.

25. Quoted by K. Chellappan, *op.cit.* p.86.

Let him flung it away  
My lover's flute is dear to him."

Tagore has emphatically described the flute to symbolise creation and renewal, "Nothing save the music of your flute can make whole that which has been broken, and pure that which has been sullied. Create my home anew with your music, no other way can I see."<sup>26</sup>

The poet's ability in summarising an idea is clear from the verse that follows:<sup>27</sup>

“कृष्णापुलिनमाविश्य तरलानिलशीतलं  
रेमे भवान् कुमारीभिः कलशिञ्चितकोमलम्”

The poet's verses spring from intensity of vision and feeling. One can find in the poet Vazhakunnam, the conjunction of a brilliant imagination and an emotional aspect. In addition his writings are rich with the essence of Indian culture and tradition.<sup>28</sup>

“हे मालति, प्रियः कच्चित् कोमलोऽर्शि माधवः  
हे सत्यवादिनः कृष्णपदवीं कथयन्तु नः”

Here the poet describes the enquiry of the gopis to the plants,

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26. *Ibid*, p.33.

27. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri *op.cit.* verse 131, p.40.

28. *Ibid*, verse 140, p.42.

creepers, animals and birds regarding Lord Krishna. The question to Malati is also the same - “Oh, the truth speakers, won’t you tell us where Krishna is.” The gopis, who think that Lord Krishna is a property in which each of them has equal shares, are prejudiced against that lady (Radha) who keeps him privately for herself. Their emotional attachment is reproduced beautifully: <sup>29</sup>.

“सर्वारःनपि गोपीनां सर्वस्वमधरामृतं  
केवलाघाय या भुङ्क्ते एकैकान्ते व्रजाङ्गना”

The gopis are said to be the happiest as ripples on their body at the Lord’s union resembled the waves of the ocean of bliss.<sup>30</sup>

“हर्षाभोधितरंगाणां  
मालाभिर्भूषिता बभुः”

Let us look at the words of the great Tamil poet Subramania Bharati who holds a quite similar view to that of Vazhakunnam, “The blue waves of the sea are only ripples of your heart.”<sup>31</sup>

Regarding the anxious research for Kannan, Bharathi sings in his famous ‘Kannan pattu’:<sup>32</sup>

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29. Ibid, verse 163, p.47.

30. Ibid, verse 207, p.57.

31. Quoted by K. Chellappan, op.cit., p.50.

32. P.S. Sundaram, Poems of Subramania Bharati, Vikas Pub. House Pvt. Ltd., Jodhpur Uty Press, 1982, pp.98-99.

“Looking for you in a forest  
Oh how tired and lost was I.

Goodly trees all around,  
Laden with wonderful fruits....”

Here again we find similarities in Bharati and Vazhakunnam when they sing on topics connected with Krishnabhakti.

Vazhakunnam’s sense of humour can be tasted from the words:-<sup>33</sup>

“कृत्वा त्वां हृदये नेत्रे निमील्य पुलकाञ्जिता”

One of the gopis, Visakha by name saw Krishna and closed her eyes so that Krishna would not go away; says Vazhakunnam humourously.

Bhaktasiromani Vazhakunnam through the words of the gopis, the ideal devotees of Lord Krishna, speaks on the relevance of the stories of the Lord :

“सुशान्तं मधुरं पुण्यं  
संसारांभोधिशोषणम्” <sup>34</sup>

Probably these words throw light on why Vazhakunnam has included the tales of Krishna in the theme of the work Krpastotram. Again, the work itself is worthy of having these qualities men-

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33. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, op.cit., verse 206, p.57.

34. Ibid, verse 187, p.53.

tioned in this verse. Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad has carefully preserved the views of his guru, while rendering into mothertongue the idea of his Sanskrit verses.

### LAGHURAMAYANAM<sup>35</sup>

Aurobindo, the great thinker and philosopher has remarked about the Ramayana of Valmiki, “Not all perhaps can enter at once into the spirit of this masterpiece, but those who have done so will never admit any poem as its superior.”<sup>36</sup> Vazhakunnam, the author of Laghuramayanam too has this opinion. There had been great poets like Kalidasa, Kamban, Tulasidasa and Tuncat Ezhuttacchan who coloured the Ramayana story. Each of them selected his own language, poetic imagination and style in adding individual touches to Adikavi’s hero. Vazhakunnam too has followed the same story of Ramayana, but with a difference. He has been so sincere and just in developing Rama in his true colour. So he is very much particular that Adikavi’s Rama should not be misrepresented even to a little extent by his personal touches. As he realises the superiority of Valmiki’s Ramayana, he feels that the best way of paying homage to Valmiki is by unaltering his story and characters. Perhaps, he feels that Ramayana is pure like an

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35. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Laghuramayanam, Norman Printing Bureau, Calicut, 1966.

36. Quoted by S.Guptan Nair, introduction, Rama - the ideal man of Swami Siddhinathananda, Ramakrishna Sevasram, Calicut, 1988, p.v.

ornament of 24 carot gold and so no addition is necessary for it.

In the words of the poet Vazhakunnam:<sup>37</sup>

“भूयस्त्वच्चरिताब्धिबद्धविषयान् संक्षेपतो वर्णयं-  
स्तद्वल्मीकभवो निबद्धहृदयान् सर्वान् प्रकुर्वन् त्वयि  
आनन्दाश्रुकलाकुलानि भगवन् नेत्राणि गात्राणि वा  
सर्वेषामकरोद्विचित्रमियता ग्रन्थेन लक्ष्मीपते”

This appraisal of Valmiki and Ramayana by Vazhakunnam is comparable with that of Aurobindo, who praises Ramayana as, “the grandest and most paradoxical poem in the world, which becomes immatchably sublime by disdaining all consistent pursuit of sublimity. Supremely artistic by putting aside all conventional limitations of art, magnificiently dramatic by disregarding all dramatic illusions and uniquely epic by handling at least as well the most epic material.”<sup>38</sup> When Aurobindo selects the medium of English prose, Vazhakunnam makes use of Sanskrit verse to pay homage to the Adikavya.

There is an adage which suggests the procedure of investigation of the Ramayana.

“भक्त्या युक्त्या विभक्त्या च  
ज्ञेयं रामायणं स्मृतम्”<sup>39</sup>

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37. Vazhakunnam, op.cit., Verse 3, p.2.

38. S. Gupatan Nair, op.cit., p.v.

39. Ibid., p.iii.

Vazhakunnam has all these three qualifications. He has been famous as Bhaktasiromani. His audience always admired his rational thinking. He was a well recognised Sanskrit scholar. Thus he best realised the essence of Ramayana. And by this utmost inner urge, Laghuramayana took its birth. Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad, who felt the urgent requirement of popularising the work of his guru among the malayalee devotees, devoted himself in giving a precise, continuous and self explanatory Malayalam version of the verses in a simple language. Tattayoor states that Vazhakunnam had first abridged the Sundarakanda and had stopped this endeavour.<sup>40</sup> It was to meet the need of the devotees who wanted to cover Ramayana by reading, that Vazhakunnam summarised the other kandas.

Naturally one may doubt of the relevance, and acceptability of a new work Laghuramayana, that strictly follows the great classic. Swami Siddhinathananda's remarks form the answer, "The scriptures of the world religions such as the Vedas, the Dhammapada, the Bible, the Koran and the epics and legends as the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Bhagavata never grow stale. Every time they are fresh and fine. These deal with eternal values of man, such as God, soul and liberation and hence their eternal appeal."<sup>41</sup>

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40. Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad, Samarpanam, op.cit., opening page.

41. Swami Siddhinathananda, Rama - the ideal man, op.cit., p.3.

In the concluding verse of Ramayana, Valmiki himself has pointed out:

“शृण्वन् रामायणं पुण्यं यः पादं पदमेव वा  
स याति ब्रह्मणः स्थानं ब्रह्मणा पूज्यते सदा”

He who hears the holy Ramayana, a line or even a word of , will attain the world of Brahma and will be honoured by him always.

The opening verse of Laghuramayana, directly takes into the context of the origin of Ramayana:

“वाल्मीकेः पुरुषोत्तमैकविषयप्रश्नं तथा नारदा-  
देतस्योत्तरमुद्गतं रघुपतेस्ते सच्चरित्रात्मकं  
अत्यानन्दकरं मरुत्पुरपते ! मोदेन सञ्चिन्तयं  
स्तत्रोक्तं श्रवणस्य तस्य कलये नित्यं फलं निर्गुणम्”

Vazhakunnam shows his ability in reducing into one verse, a number of ideas relevant to the situation. Throughout this book we find him reducing precisely the corresponding events, situations, stories and morals with respect to the original Ramayana. At the same time, he is not ready to compromise with any important material found in the original Ramayana. S. Guptan Nair observes that the great work Ramayana is at the same time traditional history, ethical treatise, social document and devotional poetry.<sup>42</sup> Vazhakunnam has preserved its authority in a more handy manner by having given an abridged form for it.

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. S.Guptan Nair, op.cit., p.v.

Vazhakunnam proves that his decision of having selected to study the Adikavya is apt and right. He points out that Rama himself has certified its meritorious composition after having heard it.<sup>43</sup>

“सान्द्रानन्दतनो भवत्सुचरितं पट्टाभिषेकोत्तरं  
पुत्राभ्यामशृणोस्सहैव सहजैरेवं मुनिर्वर्णयन्  
त्वल्लीलाश्रवणं तवापि सुखदं पुण्यप्रदं चब्रुवन्  
सामर्थ्येन परांश्चकार सकलान् रामायणं शृण्वत”

Vazhakunnam's poetic talent is evident from this verse. He says that Ramayana is great as it is written by the great sage Valmiki. Naturally it is more touching when it flows out of Lava and Kusa, its living characters. They being the sons of Rama, and disciples of Valmiki, it has a penetrating appeal. These factors together influenced even Rama, who finding it sweet and interesting, welcomed it whole-heartedly. Rama's words would have been a source of encouragement even for Vazhakunnam.

Vazhakunnam reminds Lord Krishna alias Lord Guruvayurappa, of one of his earlier births as Sri Rama. The poet calls Lord many a time, and tells him these sweet stories. He makes his verse so simple and interesting as though Lord Guruvayurappa is a small child eagerly listening to him. The poet's brevity suggests us to think of the lack of time the Lord can spare to hear his words.

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43. Vazhakunnam, op.cit. Verse 4 p.2.

The Devas ask Lord Vishnu to take birth for destroying the demons. Vazhakunnam, the bhakta poet experiences happiness and excitement even while he describes the situation:<sup>44</sup>

“श्रीरामस्य तवावतारसमयं  
सञ्चिन्त्य बाष्पाञ्चितः  
प्राग्बद्धाञ्जलिरञ्जनाभ  
जलघौ मग्नोस्मि मोदात्मके”

The ecstasy enjoyed by Vazhakunnam is indicative of his sincere devotional attitude. While thinking of his Lord a bhakta sometimes dances, falls down, yawns, breaths heavily - all without concern of circumstances. When bhava (permanent loving attitude for God), anubhava (when feelings and emotions within oneself are exhibited) and vyabhicari symptoms (primarily the words uttered and the different bodily features) are combined, the bhakta attains supreme happiness. Swami Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada has explained the drastic effect of Bhaktirasa on the devotees.<sup>45</sup> Here in the above mentioned sloka the Bhaktasiromani is seen awaiting blissfully the birth of the Lord. This longing of Vazhakunnam is comparable with the following lines of Gagan

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44. *Ibid.*, verse 15, p.6.

45. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Teachings of Lord Caitanya, The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, Bombay, 1980, pp.143-44.

song that have been quoted by Tagore.<sup>46</sup>

“I am listless for that moonrise of beauty  
which is to light my life  
Which I long to see in the fulness of vision,  
In gladness of heart”

Vazhakunnam’s description of the arrival of Tadaka is quite appropriate to the situation:

“ज्याघोषं तव भीषणं वनचरी श्रुत्वा क्रुधाभिद्रुता  
सान्द्रानन्दतनुं निरीक्ष्य भगवन् त्वामत्तुमेषोद्यता  
हुंकारेण मुनेर्निरुद्धगमना त्वत्सायकैर्भूषिता

.....<sup>47</sup>

Vazhakunnam utilises two verses in projecting the merits of river Ganga. He remembers the tremendous penance of Bhageeratha in this context. Vazhakunnam, who praises the holiness of Ganga attributes its origin to the feet of the Lord, who is none other than the ruling deity of Guruvayur:

“कुर्वन्तं सुलभां नृणां  
सुरनदीं त्वत्पादपद्मोत्थिताम्” (1,44)

In the same sloka, he observes that the very story connected with

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46. Rabindranath Tagore, Creative Unity, The Macmillan Company of India Ltd., New Delhi, p.79.

47. Vazhakunnam, op.cit., verse 26, p.9.

Ganga is auspicious and worth giving salvation. It will be interesting to look at the observation of Vinoba, while he describes the beauty, loveliness and brightness of the sacred Ganga. He says that Ganga is like a mother - she washes off and carries away in her course, all the impurities of our mind and body.<sup>48</sup> Swami Tapovanam, who has written a comparatively large book of Sanskrit verses namely Hymn to Ganga, has tried to bring out all the relevant information regarding Ganga paying high homage to her. In one of these verses he says that Yamuna, Sarasvati, Annapoorna, Bhageeratha and Adi Sankara worship Ganga; along with many other devotees.<sup>49</sup>

“भक्तेनाथ भगीरथेन भगवत्पादैश्चपादार्चकैः  
यानित्यं समुपाश्रिता विजयतेगंगोत्तरीसद्मनि”

Both the Sanskrit poets Swami Tapovanam and Vazhakunnam exhibit their love for the great and sacred river, realising the pulses of the Indians. Vazhakunnam has absorbed Indian culture, legends and mythology and has played his role in popularising them. Again it may be with this aim that Vazhakunnam in 4 verses describes Kamadhenu.<sup>50</sup>

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48. Vinoba, Talks on the Gita, Sarva Seva Sangha Prakashan Varanasi. 1978 p. iii

49. Swami Tapovanam, Hymn to Ganga; 1-3 Tapovan Kuti, Himalayas, 1969, p.4.

50. Vazhakunnam, op.cit., verses 52-55, pp.18-19.

Vazhakunnam compares the strength of Vasishta and Viswamitra representing Brahmatejas and Kshatrabalam respectively. He illustrates the superiority of the former by describing the war between the two. In this context he mentions, autobiographically:-

“अस्त्राणिक्षिपतोस्य तत्करघृतो दण्डः प्रभोप्राज्वलत्  
कालस्येव निरीक्ष्य तच्च भगवन् शान्तोभवद्गाधिजः  
तस्मान्मैथिलपार्श्वगस्य भवतश्शक्तिं पुरैवोत्कटां  
जानन्त्वामनिशं भजानि तदिदंक्षात्रं बलं सन्त्यजन्” 51

Tagore also compares the two sages Viswamitra and Vasishta, as follows:-<sup>52</sup> “Both of them were great, but they represented two different types of wisdom and there was conflict between them. Vishvamitra sought to achieve power and was proud of it, Vasishta was rudely smitten by that power.” The poet congratulates Vasishta on his power to forgive the other rising himself to a higher level. Tagore concludes remarks, in his own style, “Those two sages symbolise in themselves two guiding spirits of civilisation.... when they join hands, all the fire and fight are changed into the smile of flowers and song of birds.”

Vazhakunnam describes beautifully the sentimental situation of Dasaratha who could not even sleep on the day previous to the wedding of his son Rama, (thinking of Rama always).

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51. *Ibid.*, verse 56, p.19.

52. Rabindranath Tagore, *op.cit.*, pp.64,65.

“त्वां रात्रिं स निनाय दारसहितो  
निद्रां विना श्रीपते”<sup>53</sup>

The sense of humour of the Nambudiris was inherited by Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri as well. He says that Hanuman, who destroyed Lanka with fire has been doing a Ganapatihoma, in advance, for the successful completion of the killing of Ravana.<sup>54</sup>

Vazhakunnam through the lines of his work has proved his poetic ability in describing in brief, situations and characters, following the footsteps of Valmiki. It is not an easy job for any poet to reproduce Adikavya closely and precisely. As Vivekananda has observed, on Valmiki's Ramayana,<sup>55</sup> “No language can be purer, none chaster, none more beautiful and at the same time simpler than the language in which the great poet has depicted the life of Rama.” The words of Vivekananda throw light on the simplicity, purity and beauty of the original. The poet Vazhakunnam has also tried to keep up these qualities and on his part he adds brevity. This can be evidenced by anyone who goes through this work Laghuramayana.

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53. Vazhakunnam, op.cit., p.23

54. Ibid., Verse 54, p.133.

55. See Rama-the ideal man of Swami Siddhinathananda, op.cit. Back cover.

**LAGHUBHAGAVATAM<sup>56</sup>**

In style, this abridged Bhagavatapurana in Sanskrit excels that written in Malayalam by Vazhakunnam himself. As Ottur Unni Nambudiripad puts it this too 'is another Avatara of Mahabhagavata'.<sup>57</sup> The author of the work deserves to be called Abhinava Sri Suka, remarks M.H.Sastri.<sup>58</sup> Vazhakunnam has himself stated that the words of Krishna to Arjuna has inspired him.<sup>59</sup>

“न हि कल्याणकृत् कश्चित्  
दुर्गतिं तात गच्छति”

As in Narayaniyam the Lord Guruvayurappa is the addressee of the slokas in the work Laghubhagavatam also. As the poet himself has remarked it is “वासुदेवीयम्”,<sup>60</sup> in two ways - written by Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri about Vasudeva alias Lord Krishna.

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56. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Laghubhagavatam Mangalodayam, Trichur, 1958.

57. Ottur Unni Nambudiripad, Preface to Laghubhagavatam (bhasha) of Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Mangalodayam, Trichur, '44, p.24.

58. M.H. Sastri, Laghubhagavatam (Moolam-bhasha) of Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Kamalalaya Printing Works, Thiruvananthapuram, '62, p.ii.

59. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Ibid., p.3.

60. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, op.cit., p.iii.

Rama Narayan Vyas speaks of Bhagavata as that which tries to achieve a transformation of human tendencies through the soft, pleasant and perfumed path of devotion. In his words, it has been “successful in its objective so much so, that it has wielded more influence than the Upanishads, have saved more lives from being lost than any other Hindu scripture, has inspired innumerable lives to make supreme sacrifice, and contribute to the upliftment of humanity and has given a new tone of sublimation to Indian literature.”<sup>61</sup> Vazhakunnam has rightly understood the necessity of this Bhagavata culture which he tries to develop and propagate through his work Laghubhagavatam.

Vazhakunnam has commented on Bhagavata; he has given various discourses on Bhagavata and again we find him having written many dramas and poems based on Bhagavata situations. Still again he has written this Laghubhagavatam. It makes one think why Vazhakunnam is so much inspired by Srimadbhagavatam. Bopadeva’s words provide sufficient light in this aspect. According to him Bhagavata has a unique character. It is usual to classify Sanskrit literature under three heads from a junctional point of view or the ways in which the three forms enforce, persuade or attract the reader or listener to follow the percepts dealt with. The veda commands like a lord, puranas persuade like friends, and poetry entices like the loving wife. Now Bopadeva says that, although the Bhagavata is counted

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61. Ramanarayan Vyas, The Bhagavata bhakti cult and three advaita acaryas, Nag Publishers, New Delhi, ’77, p.44.

among the Puranas, it combines the features of all the three categories mentioned above. It is particularly the last aspect that endows a unique attractive and exalting beauty to Bhagavata.<sup>62</sup> These words of Bopadeva help us understand why Vazhakunnam was so much inspired by Bhagavata throughout his life.

Vazhakunnam has done a very great service for the future generations. To keep this Bhagavata culture far and wide beyond space and time he spent his life as a Bhagavatottama. The corresponding verses in Sanskrit and Malayalam of the works Laghubhagavatam (Sanskrit) and Laghubhagavatam (Malayalam) do throw light on the excellence of the translational skill of the great poet Vazhakunnam. As Coleridge says, “the translation of poetry into poetry is difficult, because the translator must give a brilliancy to his language without the warmth of the original conception from which such brilliancy would flow of its own accord.”<sup>63</sup> Vazhakunnam himself says that his Malayalam translation is based on his Sanskrit work Laghubhagavatam.<sup>64</sup> Ottur Unni Nambudiripad differentiates these works by stating that the Sanskrit work is of a higher standard where as the Malayalam

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62. Quoted by V. Raghavan, Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagavata writers, Publications Division, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 1981, pp.128-129.

63. Quoted by K.S. Srinivasan, Ibid., p.3.

64. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Laghubhagavatam (Moolam-bhasha), op.cit., p.3.

work is more simple.<sup>65</sup>

Pareekshit Ramavarma Tampuran in his introduction to the Laghubhagavatam has appreciated the ability of Vazhakunnam in reducing the Bhagavata precisely and beautifully. In his own words<sup>66</sup>

“अहो ! सारसंग्रहचातुरी कविवरस्य”

The very first stanza of Laghubhagavatam throws light on the date of its composition. In the footnote 'सूतं धन्यं वदान्यम्' is given by Vazhakunnam as the Kalidinasamkhya of the date of its composition.<sup>67</sup> According to this chronogram, it can be seen that the work was written in 1942. But the work found light after sixteen years in 1958. This shows that Vazhakunnam was not at all over enthusiastic in earning name and fame by publications.

The authorship of the work is imprinted by the colophon given at the end:<sup>68</sup>

“कदलीगिरिधरणीसुर-

वासुदेवपूज्यपादैः कृतोयम्”

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65. Ottur Unni Nambudiripad, op.cit., p.24.

66. Pareekshit Ramavarma Tampuran, op.cit., p.iii.

67. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Laghubhagavatam, Mangalodayam, Trichur, p.2.

68. Ibid., p.72.

To illustrate Vazhakunnam's ability to condense, a peep into the sixth skandha of Bhagavata is interesting. In the 1st chapter the following ideas are seen as Sri Suka's explanation to the queries of Pareekshit - sins committed during past lives get washed off by repentance. Again repentance over past deeds relieves one from the ill effects of sins, but does not eliminate the inherent tendency to do evil. By Jnana yoga even this tendency is eradicated. But Jnana yoga being out of reach for the common man, Sri Suka comes to the easiest solution-chanting Lord's names. In this context the story of Ajamila is elaborated.

This chapter has been summarised in the following verse of Laghubhagavatam:<sup>69</sup>

“केचिद्भक्तास्त्वदीयं सुमधुरमधुरं नाम शश्वत् पठन्तः  
 प्रेमाद्रा बाष्पसिक्ताश्चरितमधु तव त्वां च साधुस्मरन्तः  
 ज्ञानाभ्यासं विनाप्युदगतिमतुलसुखं यान्ति संन्यस्य सर्वं  
 दासीभर्ताप्रमाणं किल सुलभमिह श्रीपतेऽजामिलाख्यः”

The sloka touches every important point of the original Bhagavata. Besides the condensing capacity, Vazhakunnam reveals his excellent poetical ability when he writes ‘बाष्पसिक्ताः’ to cover the idea of repentance. The tears shed is the culmination of repentance. Vazhakunnam's choice of the word ‘bashpasikta’ is very significant.

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69. Ibid., p.28.

Vazhakunnam's Laghubhagavatam is precise and poetical throughout. It gives the nectar of Bhagavata even to those who are unfortunate, and cannot read the whole of the voluminous Srimadbhagavatam.

The great scholar Emerson, the American who loved India, mentions in one of his letters to Max Muller which he wrote on 4th August 1873 that the Indian books that attracted him were Bhagavadgita, Vishnupurana, Manusmriti and Bhagavatapurana. He declares, "..... I still prize the first chapters of that Bhagavat as wonderful ....."<sup>70</sup> Emerson had this opinion without reading the original of the texts including Bhagavata. It was Burnouf's books on Bhagavata that inspired him. Many a scholar would thus be attracted to Bhagavata by reading books based on Bhagavata.

So, if Vazhakunnam's Laghubhagavatam produces an interest for the reader in the Srimadbhagavatam, then to say the least, the first step towards the propagation of Bhagavata culture is fulfilled by Vazhakunnam.

#### **BHAGAVATASTAVAH <sup>71</sup>**

The set of poems under the title 'Bhagavatastavah', of

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70. Quoted by Krishna Nanda Joshi, America looks at India, The West looks at India, Prakash Book Depot (Regd.), Bareilly, U.P., '69, p.17.

71. Vazhakunnam, Bhagavatastavah, Appendix to Laghubhagavatam, Mangalodayam, Trichur, '58, pp.73-74.

Vazhakunnam, has been appended to his work Laghubhagavatam, after the colophon:

“श्रीकदलीगिरिधरणीसुरवासुदेवपूज्यपादैः  
कृतोयं ‘लघुभागवतः’ संपूर्णः”

Vazhakunnam’s habit of giving colophon at the end of his works serves as a boon to the later generations interested in the study of the poet and his works.

It is a pitiable fact that this small and beautiful collection of verses is not as popular as the other works of Vazhakunnam. Even the great scholar Ulloor has not recognised it.<sup>72</sup> Again this title is not seen mentioned in the authoritative books like Sahityakara directory<sup>73</sup> and Kerala Sahitya Vijnanakosam,<sup>74</sup> wherein the poet Vazhakunnam and his works have been listed.

There have been many works dealing with the subject matter of Bhagavata. But this work has a difference - it is a prayer to Bhagavata having deified it.

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72. Ulloor, KSC Vol. I, University of Kerala, Dec.’65, pp.250-256

73. Sahityakaradirectory, Kerala Sahitya Academy, Trichur, ’76. p.500.

74. Kerala Sahitya Vijnanakosam, Pub.Thomas Pappy, Velamkulam, Aug.’69, p.769.

To answer the question - why Bhagavatastavah deserves investigation, the words of Whitman are worth listening:

“The words of true poems  
give you more than poems  
They give you to form yourself  
Poems, religions, politics, war, peace,  
Behaviour, Histories, essays, daily life  
and everything else.”<sup>75</sup>

Vazhakunnam has absorbed Bhagavatapurana and has re-generated its message and culture through his Laghubhagavatam in Sanskrit and Malayalam. He is not satisfied with that. So he writes this work Bhagavatastavah. He has made poems, developed his peaceful behaviour, shaped his daily life and everything else with the inspiration from the Bhagavata.

Vazhakunnam lived in the world along with the people and he tried to impart moral and spiritual education to his fellowmen through all methods he could. He was always turned towards Lord Krishna. And as Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has rightly remarked:<sup>76</sup> “When we dwell in him, and with him we become channels of His light and power, instruments of his working.”

It was his firm belief in Lord Guruvayurappa, that gave con-

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75. Quoted by Krishna Nand Joshi, op.cit. p.49.

76. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Living with a purpose, Orient Paper backs, News Delhi, '76, p.34-35.

fidence to Vazhakunnam, to do what he wished. And so he did not spend his life solitarily in mountain tops or monasteries.

The opening verse itself gives a taste of Vazhakunnam's poems:<sup>77</sup>

“श्रीमद्भागवत त्वमेवगिरिशो विष्णुर्विधिः पद्मजा  
गौरी पद्मजवल्लभा भगवती काली च कात्यायनी  
अन्येचेन्द्रमुखा मखाधिपतयो यस्माद्भवत्सेवयै-  
वास्मान्कृष्णकटाक्षभाग्यकलितान् तद्वास्यसक्तान् कुरु”

He prays Bhagavata to bless him to enjoy the merciful sight of his beloved Lord Krishna. He identifies Bhagavata to be representing all the deities.

Again Bhagavata is identified with Lord Krishna and reversely Krishna is conceived as Bhagavata personified:<sup>78</sup>

“श्रीमद्भागवतत्वमेवमुरलीं गृह्णन् कलिन्दात्मजा-  
कूलेपिञ्चकलापकोमलकचः श्रीकृष्णनामा पुरा”

The fourth verse proposes Bhagavata as though beyond male-female differentiation. She who distributed amrutha, churned out of the ocean of milk is a female personification of Bhagavata, so

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77. Vazhakunnam, Bhagavatastavah, verse 1. p.1.

78. *Ibid.*, verse 8, p.ii.

charming that even Siva (the destroyer of the Cupid) was attracted by her. Lord Krishna, the male personification of Bhagavata could attract the numerous ladies of Vraja. Thus Bhagavata has both male and female potential.

“नारीनासिपुमांस्तथापि वहसि स्वात्मानमेतद् द्वयं  
तत्राद्यामृतभाजना विजयसे कृष्णादिरूपोऽ परः  
एतां त्वांशरणंप्रपद्य भगवानीशः कृतार्थोऽ भवत्  
गोपालात्मकमन्यमेत्य पशुपस्त्रीसन्ततिश्चैव हि” 79

All the eleven verses in the work compete with each other in devotional fervour. All are saturated with scholarly concepts and imaginations. The work deserves attention as the author is Vazhakunnam who himself is a Bhagavotottama.

### SASTRSTUTIH<sup>80</sup>

In his introduction to Sastrstutih, a short work of Vazhakunnam containing 21 slokas, Venmani Parameswaran Nambudiripad<sup>81</sup> has emphasised the urgent need of the book among the devotees. He praises Vazhakunnam, for having blessed the people by having composed these verses. He adds that they are very lucky for

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79. Ibid., verse 4, p. i

80. Vazhakunnam, Sastrstutih, Gnanodayam Press, Kalady, 1926.

81. Venmani (Kuttan)Parameswaran Nambudiripad, Introduction, Ibid. p.ii.

having got immensely beautiful set of stotras to worship Lord Ayyappa. Vazhakunnam himself says in his preamble to the work that the recitation of the same will enable the reader to attain many fortunes including psychological peace caused by the grace of Lord Ayyappa.<sup>82</sup>

Vazhakunnam throws light on why he has written a work on Lord Ayyappa. He says in one of his slokas, that it is proper for him to pray Lord Ayyappa to achieve Lord Krishna's grace by his blessing.<sup>83</sup> He reminds that Lord Ayyappa is born of Lord Vishnu, the original form of Lord Krishna.<sup>84</sup> Vazhakunnam prays the son to get the mercy of one of his parents. It is this way of thought that resulted in the formation of the work. This reasoning of Vazhakunnam helps to clarify the doubt of any common man, who thinks about the appropriateness of a prayer on Lord Ayyappa to be written by a devotee of Lord Krishna.

Vazhakunnam in one of his slokas says that Lord Ayyappa is situated on the banks of the river Nila. Here he means that the Lord is none other than the ruling deity of the temple at Chamravattom.<sup>85</sup> Again he identifies the Lord with other divine personalities like Hari, Balarama, Kiratamoorti, Kali, Saraswati

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82. Vazhakunnam, Ibid., p.i.

83. Ibid., verse 3, p.2.

84. Ibid., verse 4, p.3.

85. Ibid., verse 6, p.4.

etc. In his own words:

“प्रद्युम्नोवानिरुद्धः किमु हरिरथवा स्कन्द आहोस्विदेशः  
श्रीविघ्नेशः किमीशः शवरवरवपुः वासुदेवः सशेषः  
काली किं .....

.....”<sup>86</sup>

Vazhakunnam’s broad outlook that all divine personalities represent the same God is evident here. Probably he has selected in his life his most favourite form of Lord Krishna. Vazhakunnam through these lines teaches the rest of the devotees to grow out of the narrow mentality that one’s Lord is superior to that of the other. This advice is very much relevant in a country like India, where there are various religions, concepts and beliefs.

Vazhakunnam’s habit of metrical composition of verses has been followed even in this work. Tagore, the great poet has commended the employment of metres as follows:<sup>87</sup> “The current set up within well defined bounds gives metrical verse power to move the minds of men as vague and indefinite prose can not.” Tagore substantiates his argument, “The water loses its beauty when it ceased to be defined by banks and spreads out into a monotonous vagueness. In the case of language, metre serves for

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86. *Ibid.*, verse 5, p.3.

87. Rabindranath Tagore, *Glimpses of Bengal*, The Macmillan Company of India Limited, New Delhi, 1970, pp.115-17.

banks and gives form and beauty and character.”

Perhaps Vazhakunnam would have implemented metres in composing verses for touching the hearts of the masses and creating in them the flow of devotional ideas.

Vazhakunnam's style is simple and pleasant.

“शिवभक्त्यां त्वं गौरी  
तदर्चनायां मुनिर्हयग्रीवः  
श्रीनन्दनन्दनकथापाने  
परमेश एवसातिशयः”<sup>88</sup>

In devotion to Lord Siva, Lord Ayyappa is compared to Parvati. In worship of Bhagavati, he is like Hayagreeva, the great sage. In drinking the sweet stories of Lord Krishna he is similar to Lord Siva - and perhaps better than him. Vazhakunnam has tried to make the verses self explanatory so that even the devotees, less acquainted with Sanskrit language are benefitted by them.

Vazhakunnam, the Keralite Sanskrit poet, pays homage to Adi Sankara, the great Sanskrit scholar, poet and philosopher, who was born in Kerala. Vazhakunnam points out an unpopular legend connected with him - Sri Sankara's mother while she was a virgin, had been an ardent devotee of Lord Ayyappa. Sri Sankara can be thus considered to have been born due to the grace of Lord Ayyappa. Again Sri Sankara himself has com-

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88. op. cit., verse 14, p.9.

posed lines on Lord Ayyappa. This is the story he hints in the words:

“विधिविष्णुमुख्यविबुध-  
 श्लाघितकारुण्यवान् भवान् भूयः  
 केरलसुकृतं विदधे  
 शाङ्करवीर्यं हि शङ्कराचार्यम्”<sup>89</sup>

The Keralite poet says that by Sri Sankara's birth, Lord Ayyappa has showered his blessings not only on his mother but on all Keralites. This is really an original idea of Vazhakunnam. It deserves admiration as Lord Ayyappa is one of the most popular deities of Kerala.

In the last and twentyfirst verse Vazhakunnam requests Lord Ayyappa to take away all his difficulties and to make him eloquent in Bhagavata. His desire to attain the unique Krishna-oriented devotion is prayed for at the close of these poems. The intensity of Vazhakunnam's longing for Lord Krishna is evident from these words. This is comparable with the intense longing of Mirabai for Lord Krishna; who gives verbal expression to the deep bliss, she imagines in her communion with him - “Oh friend, I am intoxicated with the pleasure of Giridhar.”<sup>90</sup> Both Vazhakunnam and

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89. *Ibid.*, verse 19, pp.11-12.

90. Quoted by Ananta Rai Raval, Mira, Devotional poet and Mystics (Part II), Pub. division, Govt. of India, Delhi, 1991, p.23.

Mirabai sing in different styles and languages, but exhibit through their sincere and earnest words, their deep innermost desire for Lord Krishna.

There have been poems on Lord Ayyappa written in different languages like Tamil, Malayalam etc. Some verses are there in Sanskrit as well. This work Sastrstutih can be used for praying Lord Ayyappa, by devotees of Kerala as well as outside, as it has been written in Sanskrit. Vazhakunnam, the poet will be remembered by the younger generations for having given them a number of valuable works in devotional literature.

### DEVISTAVAH<sup>91</sup>

This work Devistavah (Daridryasamanastotram) written by Vazhakunnam does reveal the purpose of its composition by its very name itself. The everlasting appeal of the work is evident from the fact that it has been published in 1965, nineteen years after the demise of the poet in 1946.

One who goes through the life of the poet can easily realise the pathetic situation he had to face during his early days of life. He had been worshipping Bhagavati, the ruling deity of Kodungallur then. It was later in life that Vazhakunnam became a famous Bhagavata interpreter and an ardent devotee of Lord Krishna. Sri Venmani Parameswaran (Kuttan) Nambudiripad in his fore-

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91. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Devistavah, Norman Printing Bureau, Kozhikode, 1965.

word to the work reminds that this is similar to the experience of the gopis, who gained Krishna by the blessing of Goddess Katyayani.

Vazhakunnam has written the work with the firm belief that during the period of adversity the best thing to be done is the worship of the Mother God. This accords with the statement of Kakkasseri Bhattatiri, consequent to the question:

“आपदि किं करणीयम्?”

The answer was<sup>92</sup>

“स्मरणीयं चरणयुगलमम्बायाः”

Vazhakunnam in his preface to the work observes the multidimensional effect of reciting these stotras. It enhances not only the devotional attitude, but also the ability in daily life including family matters and social aspects.<sup>93</sup> The following verse clarifies the matters to be considered for favourable decisions by the Goddess:<sup>94</sup>

“शिवेदारिद्र्यं यत्प्रदहति परां सम्पदमलं

ददात्येतस्मिंस्त्वच्चरणयुगमूले निपतितः

करिष्येशर्वाणि ! प्रणतिमुरुतापेन विवशो

विपद्भ्यः सर्वाभ्यो जननि ! सततं पाहि कृपया”

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92. See Dr. K. Kunjunni Raja, *The Contribution of Kerala to Sanskrit Literature*, University of Madras, 1980, p.88.

93. Vazhakunnam, *op.cit.*, Preface (Ashirvadam), Opening page.

94. *Ibid.*, p.1

The poet Vazhakunnam asks many a time to increase his devotion for Lord Krishna.

“श्रीकृष्णप्रेमतृष्णाविवशमयि

जवादाकलयापराधं

क्षान्त्वा सर्वशिवे ! मां कलय

हरिकथामात्रमित्रं पवित्रम्” (v.8)

Vazhakunnam believes that grace of Goddess is helpful in attaining his Lord. This view of Vazhakunnam resembles that of Sri Rama Devi,<sup>95</sup> “God’s grace is essential at every stage in Sadhana whatever be the path one adopts.” And she adds, “The highest experience of absorption of God comes only when God lifts you above the realm of Avidya...Once one takes a dip in that ocean of purity which is God, one is absolved of all sins, purified of all contaminations and liberated from all bonds.”

Since all the nine verses in the book have no special reference to the incidents connected to the poet’s life, they can be used by all devotees to pray the Goddess especially for getting rid of poverty and for increasing devotion to Lord Krishna.

The remarks of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu is highly relevant in this context,<sup>96</sup> “By the mercy of Krishna, one gets a spiritual

95. Sri Ramadevi, Quoted in Ambrosia, Vol,I, The Mangalore Press, Mangalore, 1977, p.28.

96. Quoted by Svarupa Damodaradasa, The Scientific basis of Krsna consciousness, The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, Bombay, p.51.

master and by the mercy of the spiritual master one gets Krishna.” Vazhakunnam was a spiritual master of his generation who helped his best to propagate Krishnabhakti which he felt was the best and sweetest medicine for the sorrowful people around him.

#### UNPUBLISHED WORKS (SANSKRIT)

##### MARUTESAGOPIKAGITAM<sup>97</sup>

The set of 27 Sanskrit slokas under this caption has been written in Kusumamanjari metre. The slokas are addressed to Lord Guruvayurappa. Each of the stanzas glorifies the Lord projecting a particular aspect. The versatility of the poet is quite clear from any stanza. It seems that the devotees who assemble at the Guruvayur temple are symbolically treated as the gopikas and this view point justifies the title. The spontaneous flow of ideas and the communion of words certainly suggests that these verses have been composed at a later stage of the poet's life. All verses are equally beautiful and to select one is as difficult as selecting any flower from a basket of flowers.

“देवकीतनययुष्मदीयविषया नृणां न हृदिजायते  
भक्तिरित्यमितद्रोषमत्र गुरुमन्दिरे न कलयेहरे !  
इन्द्रनीलमणिनीलमार्द्ररसमिन्दिराधृतपदमुदा  
त्वाविलोक्य परमादरेण विलसन्ति यत्रविविधाजनाः”

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96. Quoted by Svarupa Damodaradasa, The Scientific basis of Krsna consciousness, The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, Bombay, p.51.

97. Poet's manuscript note book collected from Othalur Mana, p.49.

This opening stanza is a declaration of the poet's observation that people cannot be blamed for want of bhakti. For at Guruvayur one can see plenty of people absorbed in devotional activities. Stanza by stanza, the poet discovers the hidden glory of Lord Krishna. He never sacrifices word for meaning or meaning for word. Poetic art and devotional thinking go hand in hand. The time and tone reminds one of the famous 69th dasaka on Rasakrida in Narayaniyam. The poet proves that Sanskrit is not a dead language.

### **GOPALACINTAMANI<sup>98</sup>**

This is a set of 73 beautiful Sanskrit slokas in the metres Ratodhata, Upendravajra and Svagata containing respectively 22,31 and 12 slokas. The last sloka is in Sardoolavikridita. The title needs some explanation. This is really the famous story of Kuchela, the intimate friend of Lord Krishna at the Gurukula of Sandeepani. Cintamani is renowned for its capacity to bless the possessor with immense wealth. Here Lord Krishna acted as a Cintamani, as Kuchela was supplied with plenty of wealth. Thus the title Gopalacintamani is highly meaningful. By giving this title the poet probably intended to change the centre of the story from Kuchela to Sri Krishna.

In the opening stanza Lord Krishna is presented as enjoying the kingly pleasures in the company of Rugmini at Dwaraka. In

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98. Unpublished manuscript of the poet, p.32.

contrast to this the poet switches on to the picture of Kuchela and his pathetic situation. As the second stanza runs:

“एवमम्बुदनिभे स्वभार्यया  
केवलं विहरति त्र्यधीश्वरे  
दैववज्जितधनो बभूवभू-  
देव एक इतरत्र तत्सखा”

The height and the depth of the richness suggests the propriety of the flow of wealth from the higher to the lower level.

## RUKMINI<sup>99</sup>

### a. Sandesacintamani

This is the first part of the Sanskrit work Rukmini. As the title suggests the theme is the sandesa, the message sent by Rukmini to her lover Sri Krishna. Of the 91 Sanskrit slokas, the first 22 prepares Rukmini upto the context of her meeting with the messenger who is a Brahmin. Then follows the 69 slokas numbered separately which forms the sandesa matter itself. The author has employed the most appropriate and accepted Mandakranta metre for this work. The manuscript shows that the work has not been given the final touch. The poet himself has indicated at some places that improvements are necessary but none are seen made. Thus it can be safely concluded that this work has been written

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99. Ibid., p.29.

during the last days of his life.

The author had several occasions to interpret Rukmini's sandesa while Bhagavata discourses were carried out. He might have felt the need of a more expanded version of the same and that might have led him to this work. Where Vyasa condensed Vazhakunnam elaborated. Vazhakunnam has composed 69 slokas in place of the 7 slokas of Bhagavata.

### **b. Rukmini (II Part)**

The II part starts with the feelings and reply of Lord Krishna to the Brahmin messenger. This part extends to the marriage of Rukmini and her married life at Dvaraka. There are 19 slokas in Vasantamalika metre, 45 slokas in Viyogini metre and 19 slokas in Drutavilambita metre. In Drutavilambita metre, the poet has skillfully exhibited the Yamaka or repetition of words. For example:

“भजनमत्र सुसक्तहृदन्तरी  
द्विजवरो वरणीयगुणाश्रयः  
निजमतं पुनरेवमुवाच तां  
गजगतीं जगतीपतिनन्दिनीम्”

In this context the Brahmin messenger is presenting the counter message delivered by Krishna.

## JAYATITEDHIKAM<sup>100</sup>

Jayatitedhikam is the title given by Vazhakunnam to the set of 19 slokas written by him in accordance with the famous lines of Gopikagitam starting with 'Jayatitedhikam....' The initial sloka is as follows:

“त्वदीयेनप्रसादेन सर्वोत्कर्षगतेव्रजे  
भवदीया इमा एव क्लिश्यन्तीति प्रदृश्यते”

The Sanskrit verses in Anushtup metre are simple and pleasing. The first two lines cited above point to 'जयति ते धिकं जन्मनाव्रजः' of the Gopikagitam. The poem progresses in this manner with corresponding connections to the relevant Bhagavata lines.

During his lectures, Vazhakunnam used to say that each sloka of Gopikagitam of Bhagavata is locked with 'Aksharapoottu' and so is very difficult to unlock and bring out its meaning- P.K.Ettanunni Raja recalls from memory. <sup>101</sup>

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100.op.cit., last part.

101. Personal interview with P.K. Ettanunni Raja, the present Zamorin Raja of Kozhikode.

## CHAPTER VI

### MALAYALAM

### WORKS OF VAZHAKUNNAM

Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri was a celebrated scholar well educated in the various disciplines of knowledge. His higher education included specialisation in Tarka, Vedanta and Jyotisha.<sup>1</sup> Naturally he wrote a good number of Sanskrit works. But unlike the great scholar poet Melputtur Narayana Bhattatiri, Vazhakunnam made substantial contribution to Malayalam literature as well.

Vazhakunnam's acquaintance with a wide range of literature in Malayalam enabled him to quote the lines of many great poets for elucidating his ideas during his discourses. He recited poems like Kilippattu and Vancippattu in a highly enchanting musical tone.<sup>2</sup> His intimate friendship with poets like Ullur, Vallattol, Ottur etc. enriched his poetical creativity. Ullur had persuaded and welcomed him to Malayalam poem writing while he was at Thiruvananthapuram. Vazhakunnam complied with this sweet

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1. See Ch.I

2. D.H. Nambudiripad, Bhaktasiromani, op.cit., p.251.

suggestion. He was also inspired by Vallattol's poem, 'Oru Kattu, Athava Rukmiyute Pascattapam.' Vazhakunnam wrote his first poem on Lord Guruvayurappa.<sup>3</sup> Ottur on his part, encouraged him with complimentary remarks.<sup>4</sup> Within a short time, Malayalam verses began to flow spontaneously from his pen.

Vazhakunnam emphasised the method of Kirtanam in his devotional path; the others being Sravanam, Smaranam, Padasevanam, Archanam, Vandanam, Dasyam, Sakhyam and Atmanivedanam. Vazhakunnam has realised the message of Bhagavatamahatmya:

“धर्माणामुत्तमो धर्मो  
नामसङ्कीर्तनं हरेः  
अनपायितया सर्व-  
देशकालाधिकारितः”<sup>5</sup>

Vazhakunnam, the bhakta poet has contributed to Malayalam literature with this intention. Again as Dr. Narasimhachari

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3. K. Vasudevan Moosad, Preface, Vasudevakarnamrtam of Vazhakunnam, Mangalodayam, Trichur, 1931, p.iii.
  4. Ottur Unni Nambudiripad, Preface, Laghubhagavatam of Vazhakunnam, Mangalodayam, Trichur, 1119, p.i.
  5. Quoted by Anjam Krishnan Nambudiri, Mathrubhumi Guruvayur Suppliment dated 15.2.1992, p.37.

observes,<sup>6</sup> “If one falls in love, his desire to know the object of his love increases. He will not rest content with this love or it’s knowledge; he will work; he will seek the service of his beloved. So even after Bhakti has come into the primary focus Karma and Jnana are not abandoned since they are necessary auxiliaries.” These words support Bhaktasiromani Vazhakunnam’s attempts in making devotional poems. Vazhakunnam dedicated both bhakti and vibhakti for the fulfilment of his devotional services of Lord Guruvayurappa. Probably, he felt that bhakti literature would simultaneously serve many purposes - his own spiritual development, enlightenment of his fellowmen and future generations and its literary appeal. His literature was thus mainly Krishna - oriented. Mahakavi Olappamanna, the great Malayalam poet remarks,<sup>7</sup> “I feel that there is no Indian literature if there is no Krishnabhakti.”

Vazhakunnam’s scholarship in Sanskrit was reflected not only in his speeches but also in his literature. Thus it enriched Malayalam literature as well.

Vazhakunnam has written six dramas (their study is attempted

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6. Dr. M. Narasimhachari, Vedantas and Bhakti (article), Bhaktapriya, Vol.5, Book 2, Guruvayur Devaswom, Guruvayur, May 1987, p.13.
  7. Olappamanna, Bhaktapriya (Malayalam monthly) Book 5, Vol.4, Guruvayur Devaswom, Guruvayur, April 1990, p.9.

in the ensuing chapter). He has written many devotional songs and their study is made in a separate chapter. In addition he has to his credit eight poetical works namely Vasudevakarnamrtam, Tiruvullakkavile Ormakkurippukal, Ramakathasudha, Bhagavatamakarandam, Laghubhagavatam - Bhasha, Santisandesam, Rasavilasam, Srimadbhagavatasangraham Athava Vasudevanandini.

### VASUDEVAKARNAMRTAM<sup>8</sup>

Vasudevakarnamrtam is the first full-fledged flower that blossomed in his poetic talent. Ullur has admitted this fact,<sup>9</sup> while mentioning about his Malayalam works. This book contains two sub divisions.

- a) 130 verses under the caption 'Vasudevakarnamrtam' and
- b) 154 verses under the caption 'Dhruvacaritam'.

Each of these parts has been written in different metres. The metres and the number of verses under each metre are as follows:-

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- 8. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Vasudevakarnamrtam, Mangalodayam, Trichur, 1931.
  - 9. Ullur, KSC - Vol V, University of Kerala, Dec. 1965, pp.254-5.

No.	Metres	No. of Verses
I	Viyogini	11
II	Pushpitagra	10
III	Ratoddhata	22
IV	Drutavilambitam	9
V	Vasantatilakam	12
VI	Indravajra	7
VII	Sikharini	9
VIII	Arya	15
IX	Mandakranta	6
X	Sragdhara	3
XI	Anushtup	26

The first part namely Vasudevakarnamrtam consists of 130 verses as cited above. There is no particular story by which these verses are integrated. Each verse is complete in itself, bearing its own quality. It contributes to the all round beauty just as the different petals of a rose flower playing their independent as well as collective roles at the same time. There is every chance for his beloved Lord Krishna to have taken this flower and appreciated its inherent fragrance to his satisfaction. The following explanation will justify this idea. It is believed that the great bhakta poet Vilvamangalam, after the composition of each stanza in his Srikrshnakarnamrtam accepted it, only if his Lord Krishna (made of mud) nodded his head approvingly. In a similar manner Vazhakunnam, the author of Vasudevakarnamrtam finalised the

selection of each sloka after having chanted the Lord's name a fixed number of times and following the technique of 'Poonool prasna'.<sup>10</sup> The work had found light due to the irresistible appeal of the devotees.<sup>11</sup>

K. Vasudevan Moosad (K.V.M.) in his preface to the book, compares the sweet musical charm of Vazhakunnam's poems to those of Vilvamangalam and Puntanam.<sup>12</sup>

The poet in general observes the rule of Dviteeyaksharaprasa. He often shows his ability to extend alliteration upto the fourth letter.<sup>13</sup> Vazhakunnam's miserable condition would have influenced him to choose for his first set of eleven slokas the Viyogini metre, usually befitting a pitiable situation. It deserves special mention as this was his first attempt in addressing his beloved Lord through the medium of Malayalam poetry.

The third stanza in the Ratoddhata metre clarifies his ease in poem making. Here he says of his sorrowful situation - no good house, no sufficient wealth, no happiness and things desirable.<sup>14</sup>

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10. K. Vasudevan Moosad, op.cit., pp.iii,iv.

11. Ibid., p.iv.

12. Ibid., p.v.

13. Ibid., v.4, p.1.

14. Ibid., p.5.

He prostrates before the Lord plaintively. One comes across one of the most beautiful and popular verses, with the figure of speech metaphor. To get a taste of Vazhakunnam's Malayalam poem, the following verse can not be left unmentioned:

‘വല്ലവീകരസരോരുഹങ്ങളിൽ  
പ്രാല്പസിച്ഛമരുവുന്ന വണ്ടിനെ  
വല്ലവണ്ണവുമിവന്റെ മാനസ  
ക്കല്ലറയ്ക്കകമണച്ചിടാവതോ!’

(Here the poet's imagination is in superb. He has identified the beautiful palms of the cowered damsels with the lotus petals; the dark Lord Krishna with a dark honey bee and his own mind with the lightless granite enclosure).

Melputtur has recommended the poets to take up the description of Lord Krishna's life situations.<sup>15</sup>

“हेस्तोतारः कवीन्द्राः.....

व्यक्तं वेदस्यसारं प्रणुवत जननोपात्तलीलाकथाभिः”

Vazhakunnam seems to have followed this advice sincerely to the best of his ability.

The bhakta poet is seen repenting on the bygone days of life for having wasted his valuable moments for the sake of friends, family, fame, food, wealth and heaven without sacrificing them for

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15. Narayaniyam, Dasaka 99, v.3.

Lord Krishna's love.<sup>16</sup> A very beautiful picture of Lord Guruvayurappa takes birth out of his imagination. The Lord has the precious eye of a peacock feather, a pair of divine eyes, sacred sandal marks on the forehead, the curls hanging on the face, the sweet moonlit smile, the body competing in colour with the dark rain clouds, the flute and the golden anklets - an excellent expression of Svabhavokti. Vazhakunnam's excellence in figures of speech can be noticed in many a verse in the work.

Once the famous bhakta poet of Kerala Tamarasseri Krishnan Bhattathiri (Murali) had asked Vazhakunnam why he did not intermingle a few good love poems for attracting the people during his discourses. The reply given by Vazhakunnam is highly autobiographical,<sup>17</sup> "By doing so, I will be reminding such persons who give more importance to fickle worldly objects than the almighty God. There has been a long array of great souls, whose very names sanctify the human hearts. Naturally those immortal outpourings, and not those come out of desirous hearts will be exalted always by the good people." These words of Vazhakunnam not only throw light on his selection of quotations in speeches but also on his preference in compiling spiritual and eternal values in his literary output. The echo of these words is

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16. op. cit., v.5, p.18.

17. Quoted by Tamarasseri Krishnan Bhattathiri Madhurasmriti, Bhaktasiromani, op.cit., pp.156-57.

found reflected in the analytical communication of A. Kempis.<sup>18</sup> “Here man is defiled by many sins, ensnared by many passions, a prey to countless fears. Racked by many cares and distracted by many stray things, he is entangled in many vanities. He is hedged in by many errors, worn out by many labours, burdened by temptations, enervated by pleasures, tormented by wants.”

Vazhakunnam’s sense of humour is evident from his third sloka in Anushtup metre - the poet asks whether the child ate mud for a change after getting tired of eating fresh butter. It is interesting to note that his father Raman Atitiripad was famous for his life long sense of humour.<sup>19</sup> Sense of humour is probably a heritage of the family.

Of the extant seven Karnamrutas five are in Sanskrit and two are in Malayalam. Of these the last one in Sanskrit is the Sriramakrsnakarnamrtam of Ottur Unni Nambudiripad published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras in 1975 and the last one in Malayalam is Vasudevakarnamrtam under reference. The former one in Malayalam is that of Puntanam. The title

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18. Quoted by Raymond Holley, Religious education and religious understanding, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1978, p.59.

19. Narayanan Chittoor Nambudiripad, Vazhakunnathinte Dootu (Mal. article), Mathrubhumi Weekly, Calicut, (7-13), May 1995, p.44.

Vasudevakarnamrtam points at two directions, one towards its theme Vasudeva and the other towards its author Vasudeva.

Now turning to the second part of the work Vasudevakarnamrtam namely Dhruvacaritam, it is seen that the various slokas are written under the different metres Arya, Prithvi, Vasantatilaka, Indravajra, Upendravajra, Viyogini, Manjubhasini, Sardoolavikridita, Vasantamalika, Atirucira, Drutavilambita, Vamsastha, Svagata, Pushpitagra and Ratoddhata. Each metre consists of 10 slokas except Manjubhasini which contains twenty slokas. As the title suggests these stanzas describe in detail the story of the famous eternal boy devotee Dhruva, whom the devotees associate with the pole star. The story covers the sub-topics: disappointment of Dhruva, his going to observe penance as directed by his mother Suneeti, Narada's advice in detail, the appearance of Lord Vishnu, Dhruva's return to the palace and ruling the country, marriage, the advice of Svayambhuva Manu (the first in his race), Kubera's exhortation and Dhruva's journey to Badaryashrama. It will arouse the interest of the reader to know how Yama reacted about Dhruva's attainment of immortality. Yama fears that he will lose his post if people take to Dhruva's path of devotion.<sup>20</sup> Vazhakunnam's style suits the taste of the modern people. He gives introductory remarks in prose wherever necessary.

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20. Op. cit., v.2, p.67.

Vazhakunnam by using metres relevant to the situations and by his penetrating style proves his ability in poem making. And as Rabindranath Tagore has said,<sup>21</sup> “One may be gifted with a feeling, a second with language, a third with both, but he who has as well a creative genius alone is a poet.” This definition suits Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri. K. Vasudevan Moosad has commended this work Vasudevakarnamrtam to be having exemplary qualities. Dhruvacaritam, in his view is worth reading daily, by the devotees as it is simple and brief.<sup>22</sup>

Mahakavi Ulloor has appreciated the poems in Vasudevakarnamrtam.<sup>23</sup> Vallattol Narayana Menon assures the easy propagation of Vasudevakarnamrtam, while complimenting the work.<sup>24</sup>

#### **TIRUVULLAKKAVILE ORMAKKURIPPUKAL<sup>25</sup>**

The book containing 128 pages consists of 53 sub topics in

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21. Rabindranath Tagore, *Glimpses of Bengal*, Mac Millan Company of India Ltd., 1980, p.114.
  22. K. Vasudevan Moosad, op.cit. p.vii.
  23. Quoted by Nenminimangalam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Preface, Tiruvullakkavile Ormakkurippukal of Vazhakunnam, Mangalodayam, Trichur, 1939, p.i.
  24. Ibid., p.i.
  25. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Tiruvullakkavile Ormakkurippukal, Mangalodayam, Trichur, 1939.

different bhasha metres like Kakali, Kalakanci, Drutakakali, Annanada and Natonnata. These poems have been written to meet the need of reciting prayers at the beginning and end of the daily speeches conducted as part of the 41 day Bhagavatayajna at the Thiruvullakkavu temple near Trichur during the pooja season. Usually poets make poems for the sake of making poems itself. That is to say art for art's sake becomes the underlying principle. But here each poem was written to answer the immediate need of the day. That comes under art for life principle. Vazhakunnam's ability to make poems in minimum time is evident from this. Thus he deserves to be included in the panel of instant poets. It may be remembered that there were many poets interested in Drutakavita during this period like the famous Kodungallur Kunnikkuttan Tampuran whom the people praised as 'Sarasadrutakavikireetamani.'

It will be interesting to note the circumstances under which these poems originated. The very name Tiruvullakkavile ormakkurippukal was due to the poem having been composed in the vicinity of the Srisastha temple at Tiruvullakkavu. The Bhagavata listeners enthusiastically welcomed these poems. Further the company of his disciples Tottam Vasudevan Nambudiri and Venmani Parameswaran Nambudiripad gave him encouragement in composing the lines.<sup>26</sup>

The starting poem is termed Mangalam and is in accordance with the usual custom of beginning with a benedictory verse.<sup>27</sup>

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26. Nenmininmangalam Vasudevan Nambudiri, *ibid.*, p.ii.

27. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, *ibid.*, p.1.

This is an excellent example for the spontaneous flow of poetical words and expressions. Here he appeals to the deities Lord Krishna and Srisastha to enhance the devotional attitude in him for the successful completion of the work.

Vazhakunnam had great respect for Tuncat Ezhuttacchan. He used to quote the latter quite often and even knew many of his lines by heart. As though he desires Ezhuttacchan's nearness and guidance he finds satisfaction by intermingling his lines with those of the other. Thus the poem 'Kanikanenam' in Annanada metre can be looked upon as a practice prevalent at that time.<sup>28</sup> Here one can see two lines of the 'disciple' following the two line of the 'guru' and this process repeated.

Under the 18th topic Kiratam which is written in Kalakanchi metre Vazhakunnam's mastery of construction technique becomes clear. The famous fight between Arjuna and Lord Siva is well depicted with appropriate words and sounds.<sup>29</sup>

Vazhakunnam's couplets of poems on Akrura is fine with poetic imagination and reminds one of Vallattol's poem on the same theme.

The poem Mathurayatra is heart touching. Here Yasoda laments in the absence of her son who had been to Mathura. Yasoda says that she does not need anything that others earnestly

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28. *Ibid.*, pp.14-15.

29. *Ibid.*, pp.25-27.

pray for-bliss, penance, land, heaven, salvation, affluences, supernatural powers, or fame. Her affectionate soul longs for Krishna and Krishna alone.<sup>30</sup>

In the poem Putanamoksham, Putana's arrival at Krishna's abode seems realistic. The poet has delicately focussed on this character and has brought to light even the minute details of her form and movements as in a photograph.<sup>31</sup>

“ഒരു പടി മുടി പിറകിലായ്ക്കെട്ടി  
പൊടിച്ചു കൂങ്കുമം തിലകമായ്ത്തൊട്ടു  
മുകുരത്തിൽ നോക്കിപ്പുരികവും കണ്ണു  
മിളക്കിസ്തമ്മതിച്ചലക്കിയപട്ടം”

Vazhakunnam's deep knowledge of the Upanishads and his simple way of expressing it before the common man can be seen in the poem 'narayanappakshi.'

The book ends with the poem titled 'Karvarnanettanne', praising the merits of Lord Krishna.<sup>32</sup>

The other themes of the work goes like Muchukundastuti, Vijayam Kanuvin, Bhaktivalartuvin, Neelakkili, Harilahari, Rukminisandesam, Vidhavavilapam, etc. The wide range of themes

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30. *Ibid.*, pp.71-73.

31. *Ibid.*, pp.111-114.

32. *Ibid.*, p.123.

have been made palatable to the common man by the artistic touches of the poet's pen.

Vazhakunnam had been taking in daily the Kadali plantain fruit at Tiruvullakkavu during his composition of the work.<sup>33</sup> This reminds the story of Vasudeva Bhattathiri, the author of Yudhishtiravijayam, who became a poet on eating the plantain fruit from this temple.<sup>34</sup>

### RAMAKATHASUDHA<sup>35</sup>

It was a custom among the devotees to read Sundarakanda of Ramayana every day. To facilitate this need Vazhakunnam wrote the Sundarakanda in an abridged form, each sarga condensed to a couple of lines. This enabled the busy devotees to cover Sundarakanda completely within a short time. After having thus summarised Sundarakanda the same process was applied to other kandas as well and the complete story of Valmikiramayana took its rebirth as Ramakathasudha of Vazhakunnam.<sup>36</sup> It consists of 644 couplets in various bhasha metres. Thus this is a microscopic replica of the Adikavya in Malayalam language. This has been a boon to those who can not follow Valmiki's Sanskrit

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34 Dr. K. Kunjunni Raja, op.cit., p.20.

35. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Ramakathasudha, Mangalodayam, Trichur, 1944.

36. Tottayoor Unni Nambudiripad, Samarpanam Laghuramayana of Vahakunnam, 1966, p.i.

composition. Later on Vazhakunnam has written Laghuramayanam, in the same method in Sanskrit. As a detailed study of the same has been attempted in another chapter a further study of this work is not made here.

Vazhakunnam by having written the work Ramakathasudha has added to the Ramayana literature in Malayalam. The former ones in Malayalam being Kannassaramayanam of Kannassappanicker, a translation of Valmikiramayanam, written in latter half of the 15th century AD; Ramayanaacambu of Punam Nambudiri (C. 1500 AD); Adhyatmaramayanam of Ezhuthachan (1575-1650) and Keralavarmaramayanam, an independent translation of Valmikiramayanam by Raja Veera Kerala Varma.<sup>37</sup>

### **BHAGAVATAMAKARANDAM<sup>38</sup>**

There are 12 sections in the work Bhagavatamakarandam corresponding to the 12 skandhas of Srimadbhagavatam. Under each section there are as many couplets as there are adhyayas in the respective skandha. That is, every couplet is the summary of an adhyaya of Srimadbhagavatam. Thus Bhagavatamakarandam is rightly the makarandam (honey) produced out of the Bhagavata flower. The metre distribution in order is as follows - Kalakanchi,

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37. Father Kamil Bulke, Ramakatha, Kerala Sahitya Academy, Trichur, 90 (Mal. trans). pp.229-30.

38. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Bhagavatamakarandam, Mangalodayam, Trichur, 1119.

Natonnata, Manjari, Annanada,

Drutakakali, Kakali, Keka; the remaining metres being repetitions of the previous ones. The name of sections are ordinal numbers in Sanskrit in order, Prathamam, Dvitiyam etc. as in Bhagavata. The work in its lucidity and simplicity makes itself within the reach of the common man. The reader can feel satisfied of having had a plunge in the Bhagavata. This is an easy resort for a short term tour for those devoid of Sanskrit knowledge and who have no time for a long term pilgrimage through the Malayalam Bhagavata of Tuncat Ezhuttacchan.

### LAGHUBHAGAVĀTAM - BHASHA<sup>39</sup>

The work Laghubhagavatam - Bhasha contains slokas in two meters, the first six skandhas in Sragdhara and the remaining in Sardoolavikridita. A sloka in Pushpitagra is appended as Phalasruti. There are as many slokas in Laghubhagavatam - Bhasha as there are couplets in the Bhagavatamakarandam. This is a metre to metre Malayalam translation of Laghubhagavatam, the Sanskrit work of the same author. Each sloka is a summary of an adhyaya of the Srimadbhagavatam. This translation was prepared with the intention of helping the Saptaha preachers to elucidate the desired sense of the context - Vazhakunnam has

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39. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Laghubhagavatam (Bhasha) Athava Bhagavatattinte Adhyayaslokangal Mangalodayam, Trichur, 1944.

expressly stated this.<sup>40</sup> The work contain 335 slokas, excluding the valedictory stanza and Phalasruti. Preceeding the Phalasruti there is a sloka in Sardoolavikridita metre which is not the translation of any of his slokas of his Sanskrit Laghubhagavatam.

Ottur Unni Nambudiripad in his preface to the work observes that this work containing the Adhyayaslokas of Bhagavata is a reincarnation of the original Bhagavata, which is Krishna himself in an alternate form. This reincarnation is a little child born to poetry and devotion. This poetry is the play of the Lord throughout, expression of wisdom and a garden of peace. The flow of poetic construction of Vazhakunnam is akin to the Venmani style, which is a rare quality that the modern poets lack. Vazhakunnam is a poet with extra ordinary talents. Ottur continues that after going through these verses he felt as though having gone around the Bhagavata - planets twice in an aeroplane.<sup>41</sup> The translation into Malayalam of his own Sanskrit text has been conducted commendably by Vazhakunnam. This work can be classified under the group Kavya. The devotees may prefer the rasa in it to be bhakti. Since bhakti is not recognised as a rasa by the scholars, on further consideration one may doubt whether the rasa

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40. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, preface Laghubhagavatam (Moolam - Bhasha), Kamalalaya Printing Works, Thiruvananthapuram, initial pages.

41. Ottur Unni Nambudiripad, Preface, Laghubhagavatam (bhasha) alias Adhyayaslokangal, Mangalodayam, Trichur, 1944.

is veera as there are situations in which the valour of Krishna is depicted. But it can be safely concluded that the rasa is santha; the sthayibhava is sama, arising out of devotion to Krishna and detachment to the wordly pleasures.

The writer of the work is under so many restrictions. He has to preserve the main sense of each adhyaya. He cannot break the ranges of the meaning of each adhyaya. He has to reduce the whole and confine it to a nutshell. This can be effected only by an expert with analytic and synthetic processes. With all these limitations Vazhakunnam made it as though a fresh outcome, and has thus proved his mastery of the poetic talents.

One who listens to the language of the book, will find that it can be included under Manipravala kavyas. P.V. Krishna Variyar in a study of the work has undoubtedly declared it as an Uttamakavya.<sup>42</sup>

The words of Krishnasharma is worth listening in this connection,<sup>43</sup> “An intellectualised religion was beyond the comprehension of the common man who needed a simple faith in a personalised God - a God whom he could surrender, a God whom he could love, adore and depend up on.” Vazhakunnam has realised the meaning of these words and this made him write devotional poems.

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42. P.V. Krishnavariyar, Bhaktasiromani, *op.cit.*, p.80.

43. Krishna Sharma, Bhakti and Bhakti movement - A new perspective, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1987, pp.3-4.

SANTISANDESAM<sup>44</sup>

The set of 101 verses written in Arya metre under the caption Santisandesam has been published as an appendix to the drama Rukmini of Vazhakunnam. Its pages are found numbered separately suggesting it to be an independent work. The simple Malayalam poems are written by Vazhakunnam purposefully to highlight the importance of Bhagavatapurana. He emphasises the role of the purana to root out the evil tendencies of the mind.<sup>45</sup> He points out that the varnana of Lord Krishna is definitely a solace to an ordinary man unable to describe the all pervading Brahma.<sup>46</sup> He demonstrates the merits of reading Bhagavata by illustrating the example of Vilvamangalam.<sup>47</sup> Through the lines of this short work Vazhakunnam has gradually tried to project the various influencing factors of the purana. He has tried to provide examples, stories, personalities and situations as proof. He is found successful in his effort in enlisting his arguments in favour of Bhagavata.

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44. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Rugmini, Sreekrishna Press, Trichur, 1945, Appendix.

45. Santisandesam of Vazhakunnam, Verse 9, p.2.

46. Ibid, verse 19, p.4.

47. Ibid, verse 42, p.8.

**RASAVILASAM<sup>48</sup>**

The book Rasavilasam is a collection of poems under the topics Rasavilasam, Hitopadesam, Bhugangaprayatastakam, Nadaturappu, Uddhavan, Utkantha, Leelasakti, Ashirvadam, Muktimargam, Prateeksha, Oru Toolikacitram, Pazhaniswami, Namaskarikkal, Sripadmanabhan, Srisangameswaran, Srilakshminarayanan, Srigurvayurappanodu and Tonnallur Terarodu. The following metres are seen - Vasantamalika,

Vasantatilakam, Svagata, Ratoddhata, Viyogini, Arya, Natonnata, Manjari and Kakali. The book consists of 95 pages.

The book is named after the masterpiece poem of the work namely Rasavilasam. This poem is divided into 5 ranges describing the different situations of Krishna's rasaleela. Vazhakunnam has purposefully made Rasavilasam longer because gopi-bhakti is considered as the supreme type of devotion. The poet has stated that he has taken the theme as depicted by Vyasa.<sup>49</sup>

The second poem Hitopadesam is more philosophical than devotional. The slokas are self contained, independent and emphasise some principles along with advice for life. It is seen that Hitopadesam is subdivided into two rangas containing 24 and

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48. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Rasavilasam, Vasudevagranthavali Committee, Vellarappalli, 1947.

49. Ibid, p.50.

25 slokas respectively.

The next poem under the caption Bhujangaprayatastakam is in the Bhujangaprayata metre. The fifth sloka is autobiographical.<sup>50</sup>

“പവിത്രം ചരിത്രം പരത്തിപ്പറഞ്ഞും  
ശ്രവിച്ചും കഴിച്ചിട്ടു നീണാളിവണ്ണം  
കവിത്താശകാണിച്ചുവാണുനിതാതം  
ദ്രവിച്ചില ചിത്തം ശരീരം ദ്രവിച്ചു”

The poet says that he has been enlarging the Lord's sacred story throughout his life. He says that though his body has become weak and tired, the mind has not got the desired purity. The eighth stanza is found missing in the published work.

The poem Nadaturappu that follows, has been written by Vazhakunnam at Tiruvairanikkulam during the Tiruvatira festival. In the 29th couplet out of the total of 31, it is declared that the very participation in Bhagavatayajna will embark one into the ship which crosses the ocean of all problems connected with worldliness.<sup>51</sup>

The poem Uddhavan with 53 couplets written in Manjari, mentions Uddhava as a minister of Krishna. Uddhava considered

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50. *Ibid.*, p.64

51. *Ibid.*, pp.65-68.

bhakti to be superior to Ashtaisvaryasiddhi, Sannyasa and even salvation. He preferred a mendicant's life.<sup>52</sup>

Utkantha, the poem which is rather short consists of only 10 couplets in Natonnata metre. It describes a set of desires of the poet; all of which are oriented towards Krishna.<sup>53</sup>

Leelasakti is a short poem in Manjari metre on the Leelasakti of God.

Aseervadam is yet another short poem in Kakali metre. Lord Krishna is viewed in different angles. Here we find the figure of speech Ullekha, Krishna is identified with a rare physician, a Kalpavruksha and so on.<sup>54</sup>

The next short poem on Muktimarga is titled Muktimarga. The poem written in Manjari metre has only seven couplets.

Prateeksha, the next poem is in Natonnata metre. In it we find Dharmasasta being requested to increase the poets' devotion to Krishna.<sup>55</sup>

The next two poems are Oru toolikacitram, Toolikacitram

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52. *Ibid.*, pp.68-72.

53. *Ibid.*, pp.72-73.

54. *Ibid.*, p.74.

55. *Ibid.*, pp.75-76.

respectively, both written in Manjari metre. The first one is an excellent picture of Lord Krishna playing flute, and the gopis surrounding him. The cows, birds, trees and creepers enjoy the pleasure of Krishna's company together. Here we find Vazhakunnam at his height as a poet. The whole world seems to be in communion with the spirit of the scene. Vrindavana surpasses the Nandanodyana in beauty due to Krishna's presence. The sunlight cools down and serves Krishna just like moonshine.<sup>56</sup> In the second Toolikacitram the poet begs Lord Krishna to shower mercy on him so that he will not have occasion to prostrate before anyone else.<sup>57</sup>

Pazhaniswami is a long poem on Lord Subramania, in Natonnata metre consisting of 34 couplets. At the end the poet prays Pazhaniswami to enable him to enhance Krishnabhakti.

In Namaskarikkal, Krishna is described as supreme Lord, excelling the Kalpavruksha, Kamadhenu and Sri Lakshmi. The poem in Manjari metre contains 21 couplets.

Sri Padmanabhan is the title of the next group of 38 couplets on the deity of Sri Padmanabhaswami temple at Thiruvananthapuram. The poet requests the two deities, Sri Padmanabha and Guruvayurappa to join hands with each other

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56. *Ibid.*, pp.76-77.

57. *Ibid.*, pp.78-79.

and to bless him to enrich his spiritual eloquence.<sup>58</sup>

In the next poem Sri Sangameswaran in Natonnata metre with 26 slokas the poet identifies the Lord Sangamesvara with Lord Guruvayurappa.<sup>59</sup>

The poem Laxminarayanan, in Natonnata with 16 couplets was written by the poet in 1941 at Kollengode. He prays the Lord to wash away all the wordly attachments. Here also he finds that Laxminarayana and Guruvayurappa are one and the same.<sup>60</sup>

The next poem is Sriguruvayurappanodu, in Manjari containing 22 verses. Here the poet calls out the Lord mentioning his individual problems in life. He mentions many incidents of his life including his trip to Bombay to preach on the Lord. He says that he has been delivering his lectures throughout at Guruvayur Kootampala and outside. He requests the Lord to correct all his mistakes and increase qualities befitting development in his spiritual path.<sup>61</sup>

The last poem in Rasavilasam is Tonnallur Tevarodu. It is written in Manjari metre and has 26 verses. Vazhakunnam ends

58. Ibid., pp.84-87.

59. Ibid., pp.87-89.

60. Ibid., pp.90-91.

61. Ibid., pp.91-93.

the poem with a prayer. He prays the Lord to make him and the people around him the cowherds who had been fortunate to play, dance and live with Krishna.<sup>62</sup>

**SRIMADBHAGAVATASANGRAHAM ATHAVA VASUDEVANANDINI<sup>63</sup>**

This manasaputri of Vazhakunnam is the result of his long worshipful service on Srimadbhagavatam. It contains 38 poems in 204 pages. It is really interesting to note that even the table of contents is in the song form which is the sole property of this book. So also is the vishayapravesa. This is one of the later works of the author and seems as though intended for the recitation of devotees intoxicated with the wine of Krishnabhakti.

The songs in the book were written at a time when the poet was unable to render his usual Bhagavata discourses. Nevertheless his mind is brimming with Bhagavata situations and characters. Visualising the character of Kunti he thinks that he need not grieve after his sorrowful life experiences.

The very first line is an example of Vazhakunnam's ability to foresee future events. Decades ago Vazhakunnam asked, "When will I witness the golden temple of Vathalayesa." The second poem with 53 complets deals with the introductory part of Bhagavata. It consists of the life shortening curse on Pareekshit

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62. Ibid., pp.93-95.

63. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Srimadbhagavata sangraham Athava Vasudevanandini, Gita Press, Trichur, 1972.

but for which the world would have lost the most celebrated Bhagavatapurana. The poet's description of Suka is simply superb.

The lamentation of the poet on his inability to conduct Bhagavata exhortations is evidently expressed in the third poem with 45 couplets. In the 23rd and 24th couplets it comes to a climax:

“നിന്നുടെ പൊന്നു ചരിത്രസമുദ്രത്തി  
ലെന്നും കുളിക്കുവാനേറും മോഹാൽ  
വാഴുന്നോരെനെയുമെൻകൂട്ടുകാരെയു  
മാഴുവാൻ വിട്ടിതോ ദുഃഖത്തിൽ നീ”

The poem receives its topic corresponding the sequence in the original Bhagavata.

The fourth poem containing 55 couplets begins with the Varaha incarnation based concepts.

Uddhava-Vidura conversation is the topic dealt with in the ensuing 55 couplets.

The next poem through 54 couplets ends with prostrations to Srisukabrahmarshi, the first preacher of Bhagavatapurana.

He continues describing Bhagavata situations poem by poem and reaches the tenth skandha of Bhagavata by the twenty third poem consisting of 56 couplets. In the very first couplet Krishna is seen identified with Guruvayurappa. The new born Krishna has been described in an attractive manner. In the remaining poem a

fair part has been earmarked for Krishna's beautiful plays, mischiefs, dances, etc. each representing a component of Krishna's story. The thirty sixth song is on the immortal story of Kuchela. The thirty seventh poem with 57 couplets is more or less a prayer of the poet for realisation of Krishna with reference to the tenth and eleventh skandhas of Bhagavata. The thirty eighth song Bhagavatatteevandi is dealt under the chapter on devotional songs.

Vasudevanandini has followed the path shown by Valmiki, Vyasa and Sri Suka, the path traversed by Tuncat Ezhuttacchan - remarks Mahakavi P. Kunniraman Nair.<sup>64</sup> He finds firm chastity for this literary lady.

The great Bhagavata scholar and commentator Vaisravanath Raman Nambudiri observes that the separation of Vazhakunnam from the ruling diety of Guruvayur has reinforced his devotion. He adds that Vasudevanandini is a fine example of viyoga bhakti.<sup>65</sup>

A set of 10 poems under different titles written by Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri has been given as an addendum to the collection of dramas in his work entitled Subhadra.<sup>66</sup>

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64. P. Kunniraman Nair, Gurudakshina, Srimadbhagavata sangraham athava Vasudevanandi of Vazhakunnam, p.ii.

65. Vaisravanath Raman Nambudiri, Ibid., initial pages.

66. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Subhadra, Arunodayam Press, Vadakkancheri, 1945, p.82.

Guruvayurku : It is the first poem in the set of poems. This poem containing 20 verses is written in Sardoolavikridita metre. The tenth sloka has an autobiographical touch. Stricken with severe poverty he has forced to find relief at the feet of Lord Krishna.<sup>67</sup> It is noteworthy that Lord Krishna in turn raised him to an affluent position enviable to others. For his better half, a member of Othalur Mana provided him with immense wealth as he was adopted to that family.

Tottiyile Kannan<sup>68</sup> : This poem contains 45 couplets in Annanada metre. This is a detailed description of child Krishna in the cradle. The desire of the ladies of Vraja to become various factors associated with Krishna's life is interesting. One desires to become his toy, another his flute and yet another the grass under his feet and so on.

Guruvayurappanodu<sup>69</sup> : The poem contains 44 couplets in Kakali metre. It is a prayer to Lord Guruvayurappa.

Sakarikkartu<sup>70</sup> : There are 32 couplets in Annanada. The poem throws light on the various devotees of Lord Krishna like Kuchela, Panchali, Melputtur, Puntanam etc

67. Ibid., p.85.

68. Ibid., p.91.

69. Ibid., p.92.

70. Ibid., p.96..pl59

Namaskaram<sup>71</sup> : A short poem in 5 couplets in Annanada metre is on Lord Krishna, who is the personification of the infinite Brahma.

Tiruvegappurattevarodu<sup>72</sup> : This comparatively long poem in Natonnata contains 45 couplets. It is in the form of a prayer to Lord Siva, the deity of the temple at Tiruvegappura, near the Vazhakunnam Mana. Through the lines of the poem, the poet precisely points out the important events of his own life. He wandered here and there leaving. Tiruvegappura, all in vain. In the third poem he says it in a rather apologising manner.<sup>73</sup> He says that this birth has become almost fruitless. His important prayer to Lord Sankara is to enhance his devotional attitude for Lord Krishna. The concluding part of the prayer is highly striking and interesting especially when it is written by Vazhakunnam, a Krishnabhakta, addressing Lord Siva.

Talayilezhuttu<sup>74</sup> : The 4 verses in Sikharini metre under this title is a simple illustration of the limitation of a human body in this world. he emphasises the necessity of the devotional path.

Prarthana<sup>75</sup> : This poem in Kakali is so short that it contains only 8 couplets. The theme is that which can be naturally expected from the poet. He prays Lord Krishna for increasing his

71. Ibid., p.99.

72. Ibid., p.100.

73. Ibid., p.100.

74. Ibid., p.104.

75. Ibid., p.105.

bhakti.

Leelambayodu<sup>76</sup> : A poem with 5 couplets in Kalakanchi metre is a prayer to Krishnaleelambika, the motherly form of the plays of little Krishna. He says that the only solace for a lonely soul melting in the cruel sun, representing the turmoil of the world, is the plays of Lord Krishna.

Avalati<sup>77</sup> : The tenth and last poem is in the form of addressing Lord Krishna to save him from the deadly impacts of the universe. The poem in 10 complets has been written in Natonnata metre.

#### UNPUBLISHED WORKS (MALAYALAM)

##### SRIMADBHAGAVATAM (with Malayalam commentary)

Vazhakunnam has written commentary on the first four skandhas of Srimadbhagavatam. His commentary to skandhas II, III and IV have not yet been published (commentary to skandha I<sup>78</sup> has been published). His commentary has been dealt with in the chapter-Vazhakunnam as a commentator of Srimadbhagavatam.

##### DRAMA<sup>79</sup>

In addition to the six published dramas (attempted in the next

76. Ibid, p.106.

77. Ibid., p.107.

78. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Srimadbhagavatam (with Malayalam commentary) Mangalodayam, Trichur, 1124.

79. See Bhaktasiromani, op.cit., p.8.

chapter) Vazhakunnam has written a sangeetanataka Nilavenisvayamvaram by name, the details of which are not available.

### NOVEL<sup>80</sup>

Vazhakunnam has written a novel dealing with his community (only a part of which is published in the Unni Nambudiri magazine), the details of which are not available.

As far as the bhakti literature in Malayalam is concerned, the author of Ramacaritam, Niranam poets, Cherusseri, Campu writers and stotra composers, all have created a favourable climate for the propagation of Vaishnavite bhakti cult in Kerala.<sup>81</sup> Tuncat Ezhuttacchan deserves a prominent place among the Indian bhakta poets like Suradas, Tulasidas etc. Poets of later generations like Purayannur Parameswaran Nambudiripad and Punnasseri Sreedharan Nampi came up with Kilippatts in this line. Ramapurath Variar wrote the Kuchelavrittam Vanchippattu. The same spirit of bhakti can be seen in the 20th century bhakta poets including V.K. Govindan Nair, P. Kunniraman Nair, Ottur Unni Nambudiripad and Tamarasseri Krishnan Bhattathiri (Murali). Vazhakunnam on his part has written in addition to the works mentioned, a number of devotional songs, the study of which is attempted in a separate chapter. Vazhakunnam will ever remain in the hearts of the lovers of devotional literature.

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80. *Ibid.*, p.37.

81. See M. Leelavati, *Malayalattile bhakti pradhana kavitalakal*, Bhaktapriya, Guruvayur Devaswom, Guruvayur, Book IV, Vol. VI, June 1989, pp.12 ff.

### VAZHAKUNNAM AS A DRAMATIST

Vazhakunnam is widely known for his mastery on the stage where he worked wonders in popularising Bhagavata. Not in less degree he is also known as a devotional poet in Malayalam. He is also known as a Sanskrit scholar and poet. But there is yet another field where he is least known and that is the field of Malayalam drama. It is really an astonishing fact that he is the author of as many as six published dramas. Thus he has not only the power of aptly interpreting puranic characters but also the power of successfully regenerating characters with fresh blood and colour. This interest is evident from the fact that he has himself acted in plays written by himself, that too at a very early age. It is also worth mentioning that he had been managing a drama troupe with the co-operation of his friends. He had been an expert even in the green room work and in providing background music. His interest in Kathakali and music added to his dramatic talents.<sup>1</sup> Unlike most of the dramatists he employed not only his pen but also his heart, head and muscles for the cause.

The dramatist in him was in the making even in his boyhood days. He would with no planning, start story telling before the

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1. See Bhaktasiromani, op.cit., p.8.

interested gathering and would go on with the story with its various vicissitudes as long as he wished. He had enlivened so many nights with beautiful stories during the festival days at Tiruvegappura and also while at Tirunavaya.<sup>2</sup> This developed the dramatist in him. The preaching of Bhagavata etc enabled him to get close acquaintance with the various phases of different characters in the puranas and he developed these characters to suit his plan in the dramas. Thus he wrote many good dramas based on the puranic theme. The dramas written by him are the following:

1. Subhadra
2. Rukmini
3. Valmikiyum Vysanum
4. Putana
5. Anugraham
6. Sridharacaraiar

#### DRAMAS OF VAZHAKUNNAM

As a preliminary to the appreciation of the dramas, the plots are given below:

##### SUBHADRA<sup>3</sup>

The famous epic story of Subhadraharanam (Subhadra's

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2. Ibid. pp.7-8.
  3. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Subhadra (Collection of dramas) Arunodayam Press, Vadakkancheri, 1945.

abduction by Arjuna) finds a dramatic form in Malayalam, in the hands of the master dramatist Vazhakunnam. He has re-structured the drama, by changing the Arjuna - Subhadra wedding into the status of an arranged marriage.

The innocence of Kasyapa, the confidential nature of Arjuna's plans, Balarama's oral merit certificate for the pseudo-sannyasin Arjuna, and the relevant talks of Pradyumna, Samba etc find place in appropriate contexts. Lord Krishna's tricks are striking. It seems clarified when he sends his own sister to Arjuna, disguised as a sannyasin, recommending him to be the apt person to shower blessings on her.

Arjuna and Subhadra are seen representing their love for each other. An intimate friend of Subhadra, Ganga by name, only enhances the love affair. The verses found often add to the beauty of the drama.

Vazhakunnam's skill in dramatic art stand projected towards the last portion of the drama, when he introduces the arrival of Devaki, the mother of Subhadra, and Rukmini, her sister in law. The development of these characters changes the direction of the play considerably. Subhadra's so called abduction by Arjuna tends to that of an arranged marriage, when Devaki herself projects her choice Arjuna for Subhadra. Vazhakunnam purposefully avoids a fight between the groom Arjuna and the bride's party.

## RUKMINI<sup>4</sup>

The familiar Mahabharata story has been reduced into a beautiful Malayalam drama with two ankas, each consisting of four rangas or scenes. The dramatist Vazhakunnam introduces the epic story in a new style. He uses verses whenever necessary.

The drama opens with the king Bhishmaka of Vidarbha and his queen seated in the palace discussing matters connected with the marriage of their daughter Rukmini, whose beauty and attraction remind of her newly attained youth. The king and the queen conclude unanimously that Krishna is the best match for her. They are aware of their son Rukmi's enmity towards Krishna. Rukmi tries in vain to separate Rukmini from Krishna. Narada and Sisupala argue regarding Krishna's qualifications to win Rukmini.

The second anka starts with the same matter being discussed by the two priests, senior and junior. Both favour Krishna.

A parallel conference takes place between Duryodhana, Karna, Vikarna, Rukmi and Jarasandha seated in a beautiful garden. They plan optimistically for their friend Sisupala's success over Krishna in winning Rukmini, at the auspicious wedding ceremony which had been fixed to solemnize in the near future.

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4. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Rukmini, Sreekrishna Press, Trichur, 1945.

Apart from these main characters the messenger, a Brahmin, has a decisive role. But for him Krishna would not have been able to know Rukmini's heart and thus to take her away in a chariot on the day of marriage. Balarama's help in defeating Jarasandha and others is well illustrated. Sisupala and Jarasandha are thrown out of the country. Rukmi admits total surrender. Vazhakunnam has artistically redrawn the story into a drama in a novel taste palatable to the Malayalees.

### VALMIKIYUM VYASANUM<sup>5</sup>

As the title of the drama suggests, the dramatist Vazhakunnam does sincerely try to project Valmiki and Vyasa, the authors of Ramayanam and Srimadbhagavatam respectively. The pages of the comparatively long drama in three ankas is an evidence of his success in this attempt. The dramatist intermingles prose and verse harmoniously through out the drama.

This drama of Vazhakunnam deserves special appraisal for its originality in theme, plot and characterisations. The dramatist wins in sketching characters of the three chief Gods - Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, the saints - Valmiki, Vyasa and Narada, the great puranic ladies - Parvati, Radha, Rukmini and Satyabhama. All of them stand before us as ordinary men and women.

The drama opens with a conference on Ramayanas -

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5. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Valmikiyum Vyasanum, Sreekrishna Press, Trichur, 1945.

Adhyatmaramayanam and Valmikiramayanam presided over by Mahadeva. Valmiki's lecture highlights Rama's superiority over other characters drawn by him. Nanda, Sunanda, Narada, Durga, Jayan and the trimurtis participate in the discussions.

In the second and third ankas one finds the Krishnaleelas exemplified to reveal the essence of Bhagavata principles and concepts with special reference to the various Bhagavata contexts. Garga, Narada, Yasoda, Rohini, Agha, Baka all participate in the discussions on Vyasa. Vazhakunnam ensures the participation of people of different sections of the society, irrespective of their status and fields. Mahadeva and Sanatkumara, Madhura and Vrindavana represented as devis, and Radha, through their words disclose their love and devotion for Krishna. Vyasa, Krishna, Balarama and Sathyabhama are reproduced by the dramatist in a novel form. Ganapati, Skanda, Sastha, Bhadrakali, Parvati, Suka and Chandravali all find place in appropriate situations. Vazhakunnam does prove his ability in giving the puranic characters new flesh and blood.

#### PUTANA<sup>6</sup>

The dramatist Vazhakunnam takes his source material from the famous Bhagavata story and interprets it in an easy, lucid and simple style in Malayalam. He inserts good verses in between to illustrate the situations.

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6. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Subhadra, op.cit., p.57.

The opening scene directly takes one into the main theme. Kamsa and his followers including Agha, Baka and Putana at the close of their discussion elect Putana to take up the contract of killing the little child born to Devaki.

Putana steps into the chambers of Vraja and recognises Krishna through the words of Rohini and Yasoda. The second scene comes to an end as Putana runs out with severe pain caused by infant Krishna sucking milk eagerly and violently.

Nanda, Upananda and the minister discuss the evil natured Putana and her death. The mention of Dwarapala, in this scene, suggests of the well organised security measures

The fourth scene is pleasant and pretty with the plays of the little children Balarama and Sri Krishna. Yasoda, Rohini and Gopika are seen enjoying the situation.

Yasoda, Rohini and other damsels of Vraja are much worried of the arrival and death of Putana. The last scene ends with their appraisal of little Krishna.

#### ANUGRAHAM<sup>7</sup>

This short ekanka written with prose and verse intermingled in five pages, projects the spirit of Krishnabhakti. The dialogue between Manu and his daughter Devahuti is purposefully illus-

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7. *Ibid.*, p.77.

trated by Bhaktasiromani Vazhakunnam in this view. The words of Devahuti's intimate friend Vijaya rises to a high standard of devotional appeal as she mentions of Narada and his message. Vijaya needs special mention when her poor financial status is taken into consideration. Devahuti gives many of her valuable ornaments seeing her poverty.

### SRIDHARACARIAR<sup>8</sup>

This is a short one act drama written by Vazhakunnam. He wishes to project Sridharacariar, a famous commentator of Srimadhbhagavatam as an incarnation of Mucukunda. For the originality of the theme the drama deserves recognition.

### APPRECIATION OF THE DRAMAS

#### SUBHADRA

The book entitled subhadra consists of three dramas namely Subhadra, Putana and Anugraham along with ten poems that follow namely Guruvayurku, tottiyile Kannan, Guruvayurappanodu, Sakarikkaruthu, Namaskaram, Tiruvegappurattevarodu, Talayileluthu, Prarthana, Leelambayodu, Avalati.

#### SUBHADRA

The first drama subhadra is seen to be his first written drama in the work Subhadra and hence the name of work is apt. It is

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8. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Sridharacariar, Bhaktasiromani op.cit., p.61.

a comparatively long drama containing 56 pages. The theme is Arjuna's abduction of subhadra. Vazhakunnam has developed the famous Mahabharata story in the dramatic form enabling the reader to visualise the incidents, situations and characters. He has illustrated the original story wherever necessary with ideas and expressions in sweet and simple language suitable to the common man. He is sincere to keep through out, the main theme; but he is keenly interested to project the important aspects. He gives logical clarifications befitting the situations. The very opening paragraph itself is an example of Vazhakunnam's style of depiction. Here he has introduced the mountain Raivataka and has illustrated the festival occasion beautifully.

"As even the Yadavas desire Raivataka for a pleasant stay, no doubt, it is marvellous. It is a custom of the Yadavas to witness and participate in the great festival celebrated on this mountain. Partha now resides in a stonecave here. He has become a Sannyasin to get relief from the intense love for Subhadra. In front of the stone cave is found a rock resembling a mandapa covered by the thick growth of creepers on its sides created by prakriti herself. And this helps Partha for a more comfortable secret stay."<sup>9</sup>

Vazhakunnam's depiction suits well to the concept of drama as highlighted by A.B. Keith. "A drama is the imitation or rep-

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9. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Subhadra, op.cit., p.1.

resentation of the conditions or situations (avasthanukriti) in which the personages who form the subject of treatment are placed from time to time, by means of gesture, speech, costum and expression and one version of the definition adds, the situations must be such as to produce pleasure or pain, that is, they must be tinged with emotion. It is the presence of these ancillaries which distinguishes the drama from an ordinary poem.”<sup>10</sup>

Vazhakunnam’s use of alamkaras appropriate to the situations is worth mentioning. The disguised Arjuna in the clothes of a sannyasin is compared to a thief.<sup>11</sup> He is just like a thief put inside a jail because as the ‘thief’ Arjuna too is unable to move freely unnoticed by the people, and has many limitations in his new form. Vazhakunnam’s subject matter is prakhyata, as the story of Subhadra is an incident in Mahabharata-adiparva. He is particular to follow the theme without introducing incongruous interventions. But he plays his role by exhibiting, as a dramatist his skill in developing the characters and situations in a novel style. As an early written drama,<sup>12</sup> Subhadra deserves admiration.

It is quite appropriate that Vazhakunnam has selected the

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10. A.B. Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama in it’s origin, Development theory and Practice*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1992, p.296.

11. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, *op.cit.*, p.3.

12. *Ibid.*, introduction.

theme 'Subhadra.' The story of Subhadra is also found in the dasamaskandha of Bhagavatapurana and this does project the importance of the character. Subhadra's close relationship with Krishna as his sister gives her a place in Bhagavta. And naturally her name can not be avoided in the Mahabharata, for having won the heart of Arjuna and for having become his wife. In the words of C.Rajagopalachari.<sup>13</sup> "The Mahabharata is not a mere epic, it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine, it is a whole literature in itself containing a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and speculative thought on human problems that is hard to rival..." and he adds,<sup>14</sup> "It is not an exaggeration to say that the persons and incidents portrayed in the great literature of a people influence national character no less potentially than the actual heroes and events enshrined in history." Vazhakunnam has realised this view. He has selected and developed these characters knowing that a mention about Subhadra, Krishna and Arjuna convey to the Indians, learned as well as illiterate alike; when at the same time an English rendering may not influence them. Again apart from the many poets, philosophers, scholars many an ordinary man has been influenced and nourished by the stories from epics and puranas. Vazhakunnam's writing in Malayalam helps the common

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13. C. Rajagopalachari, Mahabharata, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1982, p.2.

14. *Ibid.*, p.3.

Keralite to a great extent. But for him many a Malayalee reader of the work would not have followed the story written in Sanskrit or English. His characters move as those with real flesh and blood. Vazhakunnam has added to Vyasa's text his own view befitting the modern world. Again Subhadra is worth to be acted being a short drama that would take only a few hours on the stage. Vazhakunnam thus realises that this small piece of written literature, just like any other selected part of mythology is essential to preserve the national culture, religious ideas, and to instil life giving inspiration. Thus Vazhakunnam also becomes one among the numerous poets and saints who came to write dramas and sing poems and hymns for the generation around them, taking the raw materials from the everliving ancient Indian literary sources.

Kashyapa, one of the characters in the drama says that he has been appointed to read Valmikiramayana for Subhadra.<sup>15</sup> Kashyapa has stopped reading it for the time being, so that he could continue reading after the festival season is over. The last portion he has been reading was the arrival of Ravana to Panchavati. Here Kashyapa compares the disguised Ravana with Arjuna himself. Arjuna's purpose to take away Subhadra is hinted by Vazhakunnam so beautifully that even Kashyapa is unaware of this meaning disguised. Kashyapa asks Arjuna, "you may go only after the incident of abduction of this divine lady is over." Kashyapa means Sita but to the reader the divine lady is

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15. op.cit., p.5.

none other than Subhadra. Vazhakunnam's hint has really a magical effect.

Vazhakunnam has been able to develop the plot so as to increase the interest of the people. He successfully creates surprise, humour and other sentiments harmoniously. One finds Arjuna asking Krishna whether his acts and dress will create problems for the true sannyasins. To the query, Krishna's answer is simple- Sannyasins are those who are beyond the world and so the worry about them is meaningless.<sup>16</sup> Vazhakunnam's style is noteworthy in this context.

In the drama, we find Subhadra getting attracted towards Arjuna having heard of his deeds of valour since her early days. She had been thinking that none other than Arjuna would take her hand in marriage. She had only sympathy for Duryodhana, who wished to marry her. Her deep rooted love for Arjuna is obvious as she feels how nice it would be if the sannyasin was Arjuna, seeing on his hands the marks caused by string of a bow.<sup>17</sup>

It is interesting to note the change in employment of sentiment by the dramatist. Usually in the original story as developed in the Mahabharata as well as Bhagavata, we find Arjuna attacked by the Yadavas while he takes away Subhadra. Naturally there is no doubt regarding the sentiment in the original story-it is *vira*. Arjuna's valour is being projected through out the story. But here

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16. *Ibid.*, p.9.

17. *Ibid.*, p.24.

Vazhakunnam has applied a notable change in the sentiment. He has changed it into sringara. For this he has very intelligently dropped away the scenes of fight between Arjuna and Yadavas. He has developed the drama into a comedy that ends with the auspicious occasion of the marriage of Arjuna and his sweetheart Subhadra in the presence of their friends and relatives. The wedding party consists of Indra, Indrani, Vasudeva, Devaki, Narada, Vasishtha, Arundhathi, along with many Rishis and Devas. Kashyapa is the chief of the purohitas to do the necessary rituals for the wedding ceremony. Here Vazhakunnam has given each of the characters a particular duty in connection with the wedding. It is interesting to note that it is Mathali, the charioteer of Indra who takes the ornaments brought by Indra to Arjuna. In the Kerala custom it is again apt for Indra, the divine father of Arjuna, to bring the ornaments. Arjuna bows before Narada, the great sage. This again is a proper act especially on an auspicious occasion. Subhadra too is described to be prostrating before Lord Krishna, whom she considered not only as a brother but even as a teacher who had taught her early lessons in the various subjects of study. Vazhakunnam has specified that this was an arranged marriage. Indra asks Vasudeva and others to give their daughter Subhadra to his son Arjuna. The marriage is arranged only after the request was sanctioned by Vasudeva.<sup>18</sup>

Vazhakunnam thinks that Arjuna and the Yadavas, who are

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18. *Ibid.*, p.48.

to be later relatives should not take arms against each other. Again the marriage of Arjuna and Subhadra was but a historical necessity. Abhimanyu, their son had created a turning point in the Kurukshetra war, by having got the sympathy of all including the enemies of the Pandavas. The relationship with Krishna, who played a major role as his charioteer in the war, was intensified with this fresh relationship. Vazhakunnam, the master dramatist after having analysed these situations finds that this change though minute is prominent.

Subhadra is a young woman, tender and firm in her love for Arjuna. She is straight forward in her approach. But Arjuna on the other hand is a calculated lover disguised lest he be discovered. He plans and arranges his future in a most cunning manner. Even the other characters in Subhadra are necessary and sufficient. Their role in speech and action are acknowledged accurately by the dramatist. For example one finds Ganga, Subhadra's intimate friend, consoling her compassionately on the eve of her departure along with Arjuna, "A virgin, should at the proper time take hand of a husband. Your union with Arjuna is an ideal one. May you prosper with fortune, joy and good children. Let this Dwaraka, that has grown you, be remembered always."<sup>19</sup> Even Kashyapa blesses her at her departure. Vazhakunnam's descriptions are sweet and beautiful and at times resemble a prose poem with its natural flow. His descriptions suit the situation while

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19. *Ibid.*, p.56.

describing Sandhyadevi, "As though to cover her nakedness, (she) tied the eyes of the world with darkness. The silver plate, the so called sky, was kept tightly fixed by plenty of golden nails by God the talented worker due to the fear of it's fall by earth's attraction. Cupid started travelling from house to house on the look out of couples to be shut up in their rooms."<sup>20</sup>

Here we find the dramatist's skill in expressing a romantic situation. One may get astonished to find that these lines have come from the great bhakta poet and Bhagavata interpreter himself. Vazhakunnam's ability to explain instances of admiration of the material world apart from the spiritual concepts throws light on his mastery of creation of dramas. He is a poet, philosopher Bhagavata exponent and dramatist; all mingled harmoniously in a single personality.

Vazhakunnam has tried to make small elaborations, and explanations wherever he felt was necessary. It was not to the least in the intention of changing the plot, but to exhibit in perfection the sentiments and characters, which must be created in the hearts of the audience.

### RUKMINI

It is really noteworthy that the great scholar Agamananda Swamikal has praised Vazhakunnam's abilities as a dramatist with special reference to his simple and humorous style in developing

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20. Trans. *Ibid.*, p.35.

vedantic principles.<sup>21</sup> The short drama Rukmini consisting of only two ankas suggests this fact. Rukmini too like Subhadra is a character that stands common to both the sacred books of Sanskrit literature - Mahabharata as well as Bhagavatapurana. The association of the story with Duryodhana and the Pandavas as given it a place in Mahabharata. Similarly Rukmini who chose Krishna as her husband becomes a prominent character of the Bhagavata story. Vazhakunnam's admiration for these treasure houses of wisdom and culture is evident in his selection of the themes from them.

About Mahabharata, C. Rajagopalachari's remarks are much inspiring, "The characters in the epic move with the vitality of real life. It is difficult to find such vivid portraiture on so ample a canvas. Bhishma, the perfect knight, the venerable Drona, the vain but chivalrous Karna, Duryodhana, whose perverse pride is redeemed by great courage in adversity, the high souled Pandavas with God like strength as well as power of suffering.... Then there is great Krishna himself, most energetic of men, whose divinity scintillates through a cloud of very human characteristics."<sup>22</sup> He adds, "The characters and incidents of these two itihasas (Ramayana and Mahabharata) have come to be the raw material for the works of numerous poets and saints that came later to write dramas, sing poems and hymns to keep this nation in the

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21. Agamananda Swamikal, Foreword, Rukmini, op.cit., p.ii.

22. C. Rajagopalachari, op.cit., pp.5,6.

straight path.”<sup>23</sup> These words provide sufficient reason to prove why Vazhakunnam has selected this theme.

Then naturally Vazhakunnam could have translated the original theme in these famous works into a story. But he has developed it in the form of a drama. A drama, has both the narrative properties of prose fiction and the imaginative properties of poetry. It is narrative as it has a story to tell and tells it in the sequence and with the techniques that a novel normally uses. It is poetic as the language is used to weave verbal chains. Andrew Gurr highlighting the qualities of a drama concludes,<sup>24</sup> “One of the main qualities of a drama as a literary form is that it conceals the voice of it’s author more completely than is usual in either poetry or the novel. This has for our purposes, two main consequences. First, it requires the author to construct his characters in words, and to make the words fit the characters. Secondly it leaves the author’s own position and what he is trying to communicate through his work thoroughly problematic.”<sup>25</sup>

It is from this angle one has to look at the dramas of Vazhakunnam. In the opening scene of the drama is the dialogue between the king Bhishmaka and his queen seated in the palace

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23 *Ibid.*, p.10.

24. Andrew Gurr, *Studying Shakespeare - An introduction*, Universal Book Stall, New Delhi, 88, p.22.

25. *Ibid.*, p.56.

hall of the kingdom of Vidarbha. The topic of discussion was the marriage of Rukmini their daughter who seems to have stepped into her youth at an early age of eleven. He lists the friends of Rukmi, his son, in this connection. Among them are Jarasandha, Karna, Sakuni, Duryodhana etc. The queen is unhappy on having their names and talks about the enchanting beauty of Krishna, who had been always desired and prayed by Rukmini to become her husband. The king and queen decides that only Krishna is a match for their daughter. At this instant Garga Maharshi arrives, and as requested studies Rukmini's horoscope and states that there is every chance for her to marry Krishna. This is the sequence of scenes in the very first anka of the drama. Vazhakunnam's descriptions seem natural and befitting the context.

In many a place we find the characters speaking to themselves. For example, we find Rukmini talking to herself-why is it that Rukmi is always angry with Krishna just like the asuras? But she does not speak it aloud to Rukmi, her brother. Michael Coulson, a foreign admirer of Sanskrit literature compares this aspect found usually in Sanskrit dramas with the western theatre;<sup>26</sup> "A character often speaks 'to himself', ie, voices his thoughts for the benefit of the audience without any of the characters hearing. The frequency with which this device is employed in the course of ordinary dialogue goes well beyond the normal use

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26. Michael Coulson, *Three Sanskrit Plays*, Penguin Books Ltd., England, 1981, p.11.

of soliloquy and asides in the western theatre, and gives Sanskrit drama a flexibility in representing the private thoughts and attitudes of its characters which rivals a modern 'multiple-viewpoint novel.' These comments about Sanskrit dramas suit the Malayalam dramas of Vazhakunnam. He has realised the need of making characters talk to themselves on certain special occasions and has succeeded in his efforts.

Vazhakunnam has been able to describe certain situations very much natural and original. Let us take the context of Rukmini's expectation for her lover. After having sung a beautiful song she sits leaning on a costly seat. After fanning herself for a long time, she takes out many gems from a little box. The gems that get washed by her tears are replaced. She looks at a picture of Parvati. She was trembling as though influenced by some spirit. Thus the dramatist gives a clue to her emotional attitude. Some of these involuntary physical reactions like tears or trembling hints that self control has been defeated considerably by the unconquerable nature. Vazhakunnam easily draws out the *vipralambha sringara*. Michael Coulson's words on Indian poets suit Vazhakunnam as well, "The method of the Indian poet was not to elevate particular people to universal status but to make universal types and then infuse them with individual human life."<sup>27</sup>

Vazhakunnam has interwoven the dramatic garland with prose as well as verse. Verses are used to clarify the situation rather

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27. *Ibid.*, pp. 18,19.

in taking the story forward. Every time when we find a verse, the author gives a comment in prose either just before or after it. For example in the dialogue between the purohiths of the temple we find the senior one quoting a Sanskrit stanza projecting the need of Krishnabhakti:<sup>28</sup>

“सकृन्मनः कृष्णपदारविन्दयोः  
निवेशितं तद्गुणरागि यैरिह  
नते यमं पाशभृतश्च तद्भटान्  
स्वप्नेपि पश्यन्ति हि चीर्णनिष्कृताः”

Here the importance of the worship of Krishna is illustrated. This sloka is recited to clarify that Krishna is the Supreme Soul. This verse is just an explanation of the words spoken at that situation, rather than continuation of the story.

The reader of the drama should not be misled by the various verses found here and there. So also he must not be misled by the loose pieces. In Vazhakunnam's drama we find Rukmi and his friends talking ill of Krishna.<sup>29</sup> Similarly Rukmini and her well wishers praise Krishna. The aim of the dramatist to bring out Krishna's greatness is not disclosed in certain occasions. His dramatic technique is worth appreciating. It is to be noted that some of these words used in the play have a decisive role in the depiction of the character speaking these words. Again some sentences taken out of certain contexts may misguide the reader, unless he is thorough

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3. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, op. cit., p.29

3. Ibid., p.16.

with the central theme, the dramatist tries to explain. Vazhakunnam through the sequence of the dramatic changes has ended the drama as a comedy by having narrated the marriage of Rukmini and Krishna at the end. Krishna's greatness is that the dramatist has tried to realise, being a great devotee of Krishna himself.

The humour and the Keralite traditional attitude of the dramatist is evident on certain occasions. For example, when Duryodhana was asked why only Vikarna had accompanied them his reply to Jarasandha was that only he knew the 'veliyottu'.<sup>30</sup> In Keralite Nambudiri style 'veliyottu', means the mantras to be recited as a part of the marriage rituals. A purely Keralite atmosphere can be experienced as one goes through the 1st ranga of the 2nd anka.

<sup>31</sup> The dialogue is interesting.

Senior purohit : Is the milk in excess?

Garland Maker : Yes

Junior Purohit : By the 'Cheriyā Tampuratti'  
Is it not?

Senior Purohit : At what time should it reach after being offered as 'Nedyam'.

Garland maker : After the 'Attazham' is over when she goes to the upstairs for 'Pallikkuruppu'.

The words Cheriyā Thampuratti, Nedyam, Attazham, Pallikkuruppu (sleeping), Trikkannarkal (To see) all these pure

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30. *Ibid.*, p. 34

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-34.

Malayalam words convince the reader of the ability of the dramatist in converting the famous Mahabharata story into the Malayalam context. The reader feels as though the incidents have taken place in a Keralite situation and the words of the characters are so simple in Malayalam with least undue influence of Sanskrit language. Vazhakunnam's skill in regenerating the characters with fresh flesh and blood is evident from this situation.

In the famous Mahabharata story we find the love-letter of Rukmini to Krishna:

"My heart has already accepted you as lord and master, I charge you therefore to come and succour me before Sisupala carries me off by force. The matter cannot brook any delay; so you must be here tomorrow. Sisupala's forces, as well Jarasandha's will oppose you and will have to be overcome before you can have me. May you be a triumphant hero and capture me! My brother has decided to marry me to Sisupala and, as part of the wedding ceremonies, I am going to the temple along with my retinue to offer worship to Parvati. That would be the best time for you to come and rescue me. If you do not turn up I will put an end to my life so that I may at least join you in my next birth."<sup>32</sup> Vazhakunnam has not made any change to this message. He has added that Krishna was highly touched by the letter.<sup>33</sup> In the third ranga Rukmini's Krishnabhakti is at its height when she says:

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32. Translated by C. Rajagopalachari, *op.cit.*, p. 201.

33. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, *op.cit.*, p.53.

“अवतारास्सन्त्वन्ये  
सरसिजनयनस्य सर्वतोभद्राः  
कृष्णादन्यः को वा  
प्रभवति गोगोपगोपिकामुक्त्यै”

To make Rukmini's words exquisite Vazhakunnam has aptly selected the famous lines of Vilvamangalam.

The main sentiment is sringara. The dramatist has artistically developed the same. For doing so, he has carefully left off the descriptions of situations of dreadful scenes. But to acquaint the reader with the basic ideas of the famous story, he has just given a nominal account in one or two sentences regarding the war, that too in the past tense. After having mentioned of the chance of the war we see Balarama addressing Rukmini not to feel sorrowful. Rukmi's hair and moustache is cut here and there and "if it were Krishna," stops Balarama saying so.<sup>34</sup> Vazhakunnam's ability in creating dramatic situations stands evident.

#### VALMIKIYUM VYASANUM

This drama of Vazhakunnam is a substantial contribution to the Gadyanataka prasthanam-points out the famous scholar K. Vasudevan Moosad.<sup>35</sup> The work is in the form of a drama of

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34. *Ibid.*, p.63.

35. K. Vasudevan Moosad (K.V.M.), Valmikiyum Vyasanum, op.cit., p.ii

three ankas and the poet has harmoniously intermingled prose and verse where ever necessary to give clarity and credibility. It can be observed that the characters sing beautiful songs or poems reminding the traditional dramatic concepts.

The drama has many special features sufficient to attract the hearts of those who go through it. The characters of the drama are developed by the dramatist in such a way that even a common man can understand the various situations. One can find the divine personalities including Mahavishnu, Mahalakshmi, Mahadeva, Durga etc. in the first anka of the drama, discussing topics like bhakti and Ramayana. The master dramatist has succeeded in depicting the Puranic characters who talk on matters of human interest. Even the spiritual views which are otherwise difficult are made easily palatable to the ordinary reader. For example Vazhakunnam stresses the importance of chanting God's name through the character sketch of Valmiki.<sup>36</sup> The dialogue between Narada and Valmiki enhances the spirit of bhakti.

Another interesting and noteworthy idea is found in the words of Nanda when he says that Sita in Valmiki's hermitage is none other than Mahalakshmi in the disguised form who has come there with the utmost inner urge to hear the Ramayana story.<sup>37</sup> This argument of the dramatist helps the reader to find a new way of looking at the tragic situation of Sita. Again Mahalakshmi's tech-

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36. *Ibid.*, p.11.

37. *Ibid.*, P.5.

nique to hear the stories of her husband unnoticingly points at her deep attachment for him. Vazhakunnam's ability of finding a new interpretation to the Ramayana story throws light not only on his scholarship and poetic talent, but also on his admiration for Mahalakshmi, sympathy for Sita and respectful attitude towards Ramayana. An interesting and novel theme is the letter written by Lord Narayana to Narada. It catches the attention of any sahrudaya.<sup>38</sup> Here the Lord's statement that a messenger is sent to Kailasa to invite Lord Siva as the president of an arranged meeting attracts even a lay man. The ability of the dramatist in illustrating divine characters talking just like ordinary men on any topic whether spiritual or material, adds to the common man's interest. The striking style of the dramatist is worth appreciating even in this respect.

Valmiki's character Ravana is pointed out to have many qualifications and powerful abilities. He has uplifted the Kailasa, the abode of Lord Siva. Again Ravana is a known devotee of Siva. Ravana's control over his mind and senses is evident in his attitude towards the helpless and distressed Sita in Lanka. Vazhakunnam through the words of his character Valimiki puts forward the question, "Is it possible for anybody including Sanaka to behave like Ravana, who controlled his temptation for pleasure?"<sup>39</sup> Vazhakunnam though is an admirer of Rama, acknowl-

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38. *Ibid.*, P.9.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

edges the merits of Ravana properly and thus exhibits the rare quality of impartial judgement.

Garga's mind is saturated with love and devotion for Lord Krishna. He is conscious of the countless powers of Lord Vishnu and his incarnations. But at the same time Garga feels pity towards the born child Krishna and feels angry towards the heartless demons like Putana who came to kill the little baby mercilessly.<sup>40</sup> Garga's commiseration becomes highly touching. The master dramatist Vazhakunnam once again wins the people's hearts.

Vazhakunnam's acquaintance with the works of Malayalam writers like Kuncan Nambiar is evident when he quotes his line, "In an assembly of lakhs of men, just one or two have commendable features."<sup>41</sup> Again Vazhakunnam is found quoting the Sanskrit lines of Melputtur Narayana Bhatatiri:<sup>42</sup>

“त्वद्भक्तिस्तु कथारसामृतझरी निर्मज्जनेन स्वयं  
सिध्यन्ती.....”

In addition Vazhakunnam comments on Adhyatmaramayanam, Srimadbhagavatam, and Valmikiramayanam authoritatively thus projecting situations, quotations and characters present in those

40. Ibid., p. 34.

41. Ibid., p.31.

42. Ibid., p.52.

works.

Vazhakunnam's ability in writing prose and making verse is better appreciated when he intermingles them harmoniously in appropriate contexts. Throughout the play this skill of the talented dramatist seems to enhance its aesthetic appeal.

Many of the plays are enjoyed only when they are staged. The dramatic aspects including the stage arrangements, direction, musical background etc. may make the drama on the stage attractive. The same drama in its written form may not be worth influencing the reader. But the plays like *Sakuntala* of Kalidasa and *Swapnavasavadatta* of Bhasa have been enjoyed and appreciated by people of all generations who read them since their composition. The dramas of Vazhakunnam also deserve mention in this context. This drama itself is highly attractive, in its literary form. The striking words, apt descriptions, selection of characters and themes and depiction of various dramatic usages altogether make the drama touching. Thus Vazhakunnam proves his mastery as a dramatist.

A play should have a certain purpose. It may be basically for enlightenment or entertainment. In certain plays emphasising morality, the main theme will be a symbolic one representing a tug of war between the virtuous side against the side of vices, with the final success of the former. Such plays are for enlightenment of truth and morality; certain other plays presenting mere miracles

aim mainly at entertainment. Plays of Vazhakunnam are based on moral principles, providing enlightenment to the reader. Here again Vazhakunnam stands unique. His plays provide enlightenment and entertainment at the same time. But he is not ready to compromise with the former for the latter.

In this drama, Vazhakunnam has made character sketches of Valmiki, Vishnu and the like taken from puranic stories. But he has given them a novel style and form. This also helps the reader to feel that he is at a considerable distance from the art form enabling him to visualise the errors and merits of the characters. Vazhakunnam might have realised that if he had sketched a human character, the ordinary reader would identify himself with that character empathetically and so would not be able to evaluate the character correctly. The need of the technique of defamiliarisation was known to Vazhakunnam.

The twentieth century was a period of revival in the field of dramas all over the world. The Kavyanatakas with the dominance of verses to prose started to get influence gradually. As in other parts of the world like America and England, even in India the verses became frequent in the dramas. The plays of Vazhakunnam too cannot be set aside even in this perspective. The very drama *Valmikiyum Vysanum* is worth mentioning in this context. The harmonious intermingling of a number of verses with prose in the drama projects this fact.

The sense of humour in Vazhakunnam is evident in the words of Yasoda when she says, "It seems that Devaki's eighth child was a girl. So now nobody will believe the anonymous words (Asariri)."<sup>43</sup> In the words of Bhadrakali to Siva, "Do not consider me as an ordinary girl with the basic qualities of good discipline,"<sup>44</sup> the dramatist's sense of humour relevant to the situation can be noted.

The discussions about Valmikiramayana<sup>45</sup> Adhyatmaramayana,<sup>46</sup> and Srimadbhagavatam<sup>47</sup> are all developed by Vazhakunnam so that they enhance the reader's admiration for these works. Being a devotee of Mahavishnu and his incarnations, Vazhakunnam is able to develop the spirit of bhakti and the real devotional attitudes throughout the drama. The rather large canvas of the play containing a vast number of characters, situations and themes seem clear and beautiful by the magical skill of the master dramatist, who has interpreted them with utmost freedom.

The drama has succeeded especially because it has been written in the same line as Vazhakunnam believed and lived. He

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43. *Ibid.*, p.39.

44. *Ibid.*, p.97.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 22,23.

46. *Ibid.*, p.25.

47. *Ibid.*, p.101.

is the right person to write it. His views and opinions have found light in many a place. The following piece from the drama is almost autobiographical. Vazhakunnam talks through the character Sanatkumara, "Those who always listen to these stories are more fortunate than the gopis."<sup>48</sup> Vazhakunnam had selected the path of devotion. He lived a life to fulfill his view. He was sincere in his attempts and so his mind, words and works all had the same aim. So all his works whether it was a poem, a talk, a drama or a message and all his actions, sitting or walking was dense with this sincere and determined view of life. So all his endeavours had a lively and human touch as they arose from the depth of his heart.

#### PUTANA

The drama Putana is the second drama in the work Subhadra of Vazhakunnam. It is a short Ekankanataka in twenty pages.

Vazhakunnam has utilised the medium of drama to impart spiritual knowledge and devotion to his fellowmen in Kerala and outside. He is surely right in this approach. A.K. Warder points out the impact of drama on Indians,<sup>49</sup> "A people for whom the drama was an essential and regular element in ordinary life, regardless of class or caste, and who possessed the world's richest dramatic heritage....." That dramas among other art forms are the best to influence the Indian mind is realised by Vazhakunnam also.

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48. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

49. A.K. Warder, *Indian Kavya Literature - Vol.1*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1989, p.120.

It is this understanding which resulted in the development of a number of good plays from his pen.

In the broad sense any contribution of the kavi, whether it be gadya, padya or their mixture can be called a Kavya. In this sense Putana also can be taken as a Kavyanataka. Vazhakunnam knows that any Kavya is an ever lasting record of a mighty stream of human experience. And as Warder puts it "... that Kavya is the heritage of Indian civilisation and that in the present fusion of world civilisations it is necessary, if we value happiness and our very existance, that this inheritance should be appropriated by the whole human race."<sup>50</sup> Thus Vazhakunnam has written prose, poems and dramas, realising that they form a part of the literature of a civilisation and not merely the literature of a class or sect. He knew that this is the most suitable method for reaching the depths of the hearts of the people with ideals of Indian civilisation culture and tradition.

Vazhakunnam is found giving Kerala touches to themes and situations at least on one or two occasions in the drama. There is a belief among the people in Kerala that any omen observed is a sign regarding the fruitfulness of a planned journey. The fruitlessness of the contract of Putana with Kamsa for killing little Krishna, is suggested by the mention of the bad omen of a black cat, seen by her across her path, at the beginning of the arranged journey to the abode of Nandagopa.<sup>51</sup>

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50. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

51. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Subhadra, *op.cit.*, p.61

Again Vazhakunnam is seen referring to a room in Nanda's mansion as 'Tekkini' which is very much familiar to any Keralite householder.<sup>52</sup> Many a time the usage of sweet, simple and pure Malayalam words add beauty to his descriptions. The first steps of Putana, to Nanda's chamber described by the dramatist is sufficient to arouse the attention and admiration of all lovers of Malayalam language. Putana looking at a mirror in front feels proud of her beauty, "Hair decorated by the fragrant Mallika flowers, attractive breasts, lean stomach, the costly silken cloth worn, slightly moving ear ornaments that enhance the glamour of the forehead shining with hair curls, face made all the more enchanting - all these along with my striking looks and dashing eyebrows make me beautiful enough to touch the hearts of all people in Ambadi."<sup>53</sup>

In the 4th ranga the conversation between Yasoda and Rohini is highlighted. Sri Krishna and Balarama are so little kids that they cannot even talk. This portion is so touching that any Malayalee mother feels herself in the company of the little children.<sup>54</sup>

Through the words of the character Nanda talking to the people in Ambadi, one can hear Vazhakunnam's advice, "To avoid these misfortunes, enhance strictly Narayanasamkirtana."<sup>55</sup>

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52. Ibid., p. 71.

53. Ibid., pp. 61-62.

54. Ibid., pp. 70-74.

55. Ibid., p.69.

One finds even Sanskrit verses along with the Malayalam verses. The ability of the poet to write simple verses in Sanskrit which are understood even by those with little knowledge in Sanskrit is worth mentioning. For example:<sup>56</sup>

“निबद्धमुग्धाञ्जलिरत्र याचे  
नीरन्ध्रदैन्योन्नतमुक्तकण्ठं  
दयांबुधे, देव, भवत्कटाक्ष-  
दाक्षिण्यलेशेन सकृन्निषिञ्च”

A slight change introduced by the dramatist in this context is noteworthy. This stanza is sung by Yasoda, trying to pull little Krishna from Putana, who tries to run out of Nanda's house with him. It was Rohini who called out to Yasoda after having tried in vain to separate little Krishna from the breasts of the demoness. This is a change made by the dramatist in the main story. In the main story Putana is described to have fed little Krishna with her poisoned breastmilk, unnoticedly. Yasoda and others only hear her last cry. To their surprise they see Krishna safe on her huge dead body. This slight deviation from the main story projects Vazhakunnam's skill in implementing a natural outlook. He tries to stress the depth of the care and consideration given by Rohini and Yasoda, who looked after the children always with great attention. So naturally, Krishna could not be misled unnoticedly from them even for a minutest fraction of time. And this is what Vazhakunnam points out.

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. Ibid., p. 67

This is a comparatively shorter drama with only 5 rangas. It seems that the dramatist has written it having realised the urgent necessity of enlightening the people around him by a small drama worthy to be staged.

### ANUGRAHAM

This ekanka is the shortest of the dramas of Vazhakunnam, comprising of only five pages. Anybody going through it will automatically doubt why so short a work was written by a dramatist from whose mind the voluminous dramas like Valmikiyum Vyasanum were born. Vazhakunnam has purposefully selected a rare and short theme. He has deliberately included many lines of padya including slokas, poems and songs.

The theme of the drama is the conversations of Manu with his daughter Devahuti and Devahuti with her intimate friend Vijaya.

The song sung by Svayambhuva Manu is very beautiful.<sup>57</sup> Through the lines of the song the father blesses his daughter to be fortunate enough to get little Krishna as her son. Later he requests Devahuti to give him some duty by observing which he can remember her. Devahuti, getting ready for departure after her wedding ceremony, replies that Manu may water the Tulasi plants planted and brought up by her.<sup>58</sup>

Vazhakunnam develops Manu, talking simple words satu-

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57. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Subhadra, op.cit., p.77.

58. Ibid., p. 79.

rated with great philosophical concepts, "The separation of that which you think is yours will create tremendous pain. This is the peculiarity of objects in delusion."<sup>59</sup> At the time of departure, Devahuti like any ordinary girl talks sentimentally to her intimate friend Vijaya. Her sympathy and attachment for her is evidenced by Devahuti's act of donation of the valuable ornaments with out hesitation. She gives a box filled with her golden anklets, rings and ornaments worn on the nose, waist and forehead along with the costly jewel she possessed.<sup>60</sup> She feels that her friend Vijaya, the poor girl, who had been looking after her from early years of life deserves it. Vijaya's intense devotion to God and her deep knowledge was admired by Devahuti.

In the concluding verse Vazhakunnam points out the various methods of devotion-Sravanam, Kirtanam, etc.<sup>61</sup>

Then we find the lady companion of Devahuti getting deified.<sup>62</sup> A kavi may describe the Himalayas alternatively as the inanimate mountain with its snow clouds, rocks and minerals and as the God with his human concerns. And so every Kavya is pervaded by the sense of the Kavi's universe. And in the words of Warder, "The delineation of everything described is charged

59. *Ibid.*, p.79

60. *Ibid.*, p.80

61. *Ibid.*, p. 31

62. *Ibid.*, p.37

th the vigour, the aura, the tension and the coherence of life," and he adds, "The artist sees not the mass of insignificant information to his purpose and it is at the level of this purpose that the aesthetic truths of his work offers itself for judgement."<sup>63</sup> This opinion rightly befits Vazhakunnam the great dramatist.

### SRIDHARACARIAR

This short Malayalam one act drama containing nearly half a dozen pages is written by Vazhakunnam to project the significance of the great Bhagavata commentary composed by Sridharacariar. The dramatist characterises Sridharacariar as an incarnation of Mucukunda, a great devotee of Lord Krishna. The theme is purely original.

A meeting of great sages including Naramaharshi, Narada and Vyasa is being presided over by Narayanamaharshi at the adarikashrama.<sup>64</sup> Mahalakshmi, who is seen serving Narayanamaharshi by operating the fan, gets herself involved in the ongoing discussion. Now Narayanamaharshi, fondly described as Lord Narayana himself puts the question-What will be the reason for the incarnation of Kalki? Mahalakshmi comes up with the answer - the increase of Adharma. Now hot discussion takes place between the members regarding the most dominating

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3. A.K. Warder, *op.cit.*, p.216

4. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Sridharacariar, *op. cit.*, p. 61

Adharma, that is to materialise in the near future. Sage Nara points out that the worst social evil is the desire for ladies of others. 'In that case, Kalki had to take birth during Ravana's period'-remarks sage Narayana. Now it is Narada's turn to speak out. Narada says that the greatest Adharma is the sudden stop of Srimadbhagavatakirtana. Sage Narayana shares his opinion.

Mucukunda enters with Sage Suka who had been to the nearby Gandhamadana mountain. On being requested by Sage Narayana, Mucukunda agrees to take a new birth on earth for composing an authoritative commentary on Bhagavatapurana. On behalf of the sages present there, Mahalakshmi guarantees him their complete co-operation in his new endeavour.<sup>65</sup> On being directed Mahalakshmi and Narada bless him an auspicious future. Mucukunda's eyes filled with tears acknowledge the depth of his bliss.

Now naturally the question arises - why Mucukunda is selected to be born as Sridharacariar? The dramatist himself hints at the answer in the concluding paragraph. Scholarship, simplicity of sentences, intense love, belief in the oneness of God and awareness of the perfectness of the self are rare qualities.<sup>66</sup> Srinarayanamaharshi through these words tries to establish the fact that Mucukunda with these rare qualities is the most apt person to be reborn as Sridharacariar.

Again it will be interesting to note that Mucukunda is known to Indian mythology as a great king of Suryavamsa who disliked meat, and who was interested in giving cows to others. He was the

son of Mandhata and his name is considered auspicious to be remembered at morning and night.<sup>67</sup> These facts underline the qualifications of Mucukunda.

Through the drama Vazhakunnam has been successful in highlighting the role of the great Bhagavata commentator Sridharacariar in the new world. The most striking dramatic talent of Vazhakunnam is evidenced in the fact that he has not even mentioned the name of Sridharacariar any where in the drama. But at the same time any common reader gets the clear idea that Mucukunda is going to be born again as none other than Sridharacariar. The master dramatist leaves it blank for the unique solution to be guessed between the lines.

Vazhakunnam himself being a Bhagavata commentator is the most qualified person to write a drama on Sridharacariar, the great Bhagavata commentator. He has done it with great sincerity and skill.

Unlike other dramatists, Vazhakunnam wrote his dramas giving emphasis to moral and spiritual values. For this he selected his plots from Ramayana, Bhagavata and Mahabharata. Out of his six dramas the one on Valmiki and Vyasa reminds one of his admiration for these great poets and their works. On Mahabharata, Mohanlal Vidyarthi has remarked,<sup>68</sup> "It is great as a collection of

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67. Vettam Mani, *Puranic Encyclopaedia*, Current Books, Kottayam, 1993, p.971.

68. Mohanlal Vidyarthi, *op.cit.*, pp. 55-56.

stories, great as a kavya or epic poem describing in magnificent language the various emotions and events, great as a sastra or manual of law and morality, great as a record of social and political philosophy and great as a sacred treatise showing the way to salvation." Vazhakunnam has visualised the culture of Mahabharata and has reflected it in his drama Subhadra where as for his other dramas and poems he has utilised mainly Bhagavata and Ramayana as the source materials. Thus almost all the works of Vazhakunnam, whether it be Sanskrit or Malayalam seem to be directly or indirectly brought out from the inner depths of the vast ocean of Sanskrit literature.

## VAZHAKUNNAM AS A COMMENTATOR OF SRĪMADBHĀGAVATAM

Vazhakunnam spent his life mainly as a commentator of imadbhagavatam. In and outside Kerala he propagated Bhagavata as an oral commentator. To add to it, he wrote poems, songs and dramas to bring out the message of Bhagavata. He also condensed the content of Bhagavata which took the form Laghubhagavatam. This was written in Sanskrit and Malayalam. He was not only the commentator of Bhagavata in the broad sense. He summarised Valmikiramayanaṃ in his work ghuramayanaṃ. His oral commentary on Bhagavata reached a large number of ears, working wonders in their hearts. But he wanted this service not only to his direct audience but also to his distant contemporaries; and still more to the later generations. Thus he earnestly started writing a formal commentary on imadbhagavatam. But unfortunately he could not proceed beyond the thirteenth adhyaya of the fourth skandha. By this time, he became disabled by the fatal disease of diabetes.<sup>1</sup>

Only the commentary on the first skandha has been pub-

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O. Sankaranarayanan Nambudiri, Preface, Srimadbhagavatam (with Malayalam Commentary) of Vazhakunnam, Mangalodayam, Trichur, 1948, p.i.

lished. Hence the appraisal as the commentator is pivoted on this published work namely Srimadbhagavatam (with Malayalam commentary).<sup>2</sup> This book consists of the text of Srimadbhagavatam, prose order of the sloka, meaning and special remarks (prasanga). This style of approach helps the reader in two ways - To study Sanskrit language in general and Bhagavata in particular. The book contains 371 pages. Each adhyaya starts with the corresponding adhyasamgraha sloka of his own book Laghubhagavatam - bhasha. The prasanga mentioned here is either a further justification of meaning or an imaginary description of the relevant puranic situation or some humorous touch of day to day affairs and the like. By the sangraha sloka, one can understand the central idea of the chapter; and thereby grasp the meaning of the sloka easily.

As a commentator it seems Vazhakunnam is specially careful to avoid contradiction in the totality of meaning. He is also particular to keep Lord Krishna as the associating factor and central theme. While commenting on the first sloka of the Bhagavatam, which ends as

“.....सत्यं परं धीमहि”,

he has identified this Satyam and Param with Lord Krishna (Guruvayurappa). Most other commentators have explained

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2. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Srimadbhagavatam (with Malayalam commentary), Mangalodayam, Trichur, 1948.

Satyam and Param as the Paramatma or Brahman. Vazhakunnam prefers a new explanation as that would make the devotees more enthusiastic about Bhagavata. As Melputtur Narayana Bhattathiri wrote his Narayaniyam (an abridged Bhagavata), as though he addressed Guruvayurappa directly, Vazhakunnam also has brought his Bhagavata commentary at the feet of Lord Guruvayurappa. Thus Melputtur and Vazhakunnam raised Guruvayurappa to represent the principle of Bhagavata.

Introducing the topic in the initial pages of the commentary, Vazhakunnam describes figuratively as follows. Vyasa did perform the Kelikkayyu (the declaratory drumming) for the anticipatory Kathakali by way of classifying the vedas into four. By way of writing the eighteen puranas, he did perform the Melappada (the prefatory orchestra). Having furnished these under the leafy roof of Kaliyugappandal, Vazhakunnam proposes to stage the Sankirtanmahayajna, the story based on Bhagavatapurana. The previous stage performers consisting of learned scholars and critics aimed at satisfying the different tastes and curiosities of the audience. But on the other hand Vazhakunnam openly state that as a play artist his intention is only to serve upto the taste of Lord Guruvayurappa. He prays the Lord to listen and approve his performance. Thus he orients his commentary to the ruling deity of Guruvayur.<sup>3</sup>

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3. *Ibid.*, p.1.

The following example can be quoted to illustrate the speciality of the commentary.

“भिद्यते हृदयग्रन्थिः  
छिद्यन्ते सर्वसंशयाः  
क्षीयन्ते चास्यकर्माणि  
दृष्ट एवात्मनीश्वरे”

आत्मनि ईश्वरे दृष्ट एव हृदयग्रन्थिः भिद्यते  
सर्वसंशयाः छिद्यन्ते अस्य कर्माणि क्षीयन्ते च।

Ego gets vanished only when God is realised as one's own self. The doubts as to whether Sri Krishna is the self or abode of mercy vanish. The karmas of such a devotee get destroyed.

**Prasanga** (special commentary) : The body consciousness gets dissolved on realising oneness with Krishna, who is beyond material objects like the body. There is no wonder in this. The disappearance of the serpent illusion takes place only when the rope is seen. This is the significance of the word *Eva*.<sup>5</sup>

Vazhakunnam has mentioned the word *Eva* while giving the meaning but he feels that further clarification is essential for revealing the stress of the word and so brings in the rope-serpent illusion.

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4. *Ibid* (1,2,21), p.29.

5. *Ibid.*, p.29.

‘निःश्रेयसाय लोकस्य धन्यं स्वस्त्ययनं महत्’<sup>6</sup>

The word dhanyam<sup>6</sup> that qualifies the book Srimadbhagavatam is given the meaning punyam by the great scholar Vaisravanath Raman Nambudiri in his commentary on Bhagavata.<sup>7</sup> But Vazhakunnam has explained the meaning of the word dhanyam as that which produces wealth. Vazhakunnam in his prasanga says that by the word dhanyam, there is an indirect implication that one who prays Vishnu by Srimadbhagavatam will become rich, contradictory to the meaning of the line ‘तं भ्रंशयामि संपद्भ्यः’. He also interprets that reading Bhagavata is the unique way for a devotee to retain his wealth. Probably this has an autobiographical touch. Vazhakunnam himself had gradually improved his financial position after taking to Bhagavata.

While commenting on the subsequent line ‘सर्ववेदेतिहासानां सारं सारं समुद्धृतम्’,<sup>8</sup> Vazhakunnam finds out an argument in favour of Vyasa, who said, “This is the cream and essence of all vedas and itihasas.” Vazhakunnam says that this is the true opinion of Vyasa. Otherwise he would not have given Bhagavata lessons to his own son Sri Suka.<sup>9</sup>

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6. Srimadbhagavatam (1,3,40-41), Ibid. pp.54-55.
  7. Vaisravanath Raman Nambudiri, Srimadbhagavatam, SreeGuruvayurappan Sankeertana Trust, Guruvayur, 1983, p.52.
  8. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, op.cit., pp.54-55.
  9. Ibid., p.55.

It is interesting to note Vazhakunnam's sense of humour even while describing important facts in his commentary to the 17th sloka in 3rd adhyaya of the I skandha; which runs as follows:

“धान्वन्तरं द्वादशमं त्रयोदशममेव च  
अपाययत् सुरानन्यान् मोहिन्या मोहयन् स्त्रिया”

Dhanvantari was the twelfth incarnation and Mohini, the tenth one, taken for the purpose of distributing amritha to the devas tired of old age. In this context Vazhakunnam compares Mohini to the ladies who distribute medicine to the sick in the hospital.<sup>10</sup> Vazhakunnam is cautious on framing his opinion about others. This is evident from the following:-

“अभूतपूर्वस्सहसा क्षुत्तृङ्भ्यां अदितात्मनः  
ब्राह्मणं प्रत्यभूद्ब्रह्मन्! मत्सरो मन्युरेव च”<sup>11</sup>

(Oh Sounaka, by severe thirst and hunger the king had lost his power of discerning due to which he felt much intolerant and angry against sage Sameeka).

The king had put a dead serpent on the neck of Sage Sameeka, consequently. This act of the king Pareekshit would raise the common criticism that Pareekshit was a cruel and illnatured character. But Vazhakunnam is cautious against such a sudden judgement. He brings to light Swami Vivekananda's opinion that a

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10. Ibid., p.43.

11. Srimadbhagavatam (1,18,29), ibid., p.341.

person should be judged based on the generality of his action in life and not based on a particular incident. Vazhakunnam has referred not only to other commentators but also great thinkers like Vivekananda.<sup>12</sup>

In the following sloka,<sup>13</sup>

‘तन्नो भवान् वै भगवत्प्रधानो

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.....

Vazhakunnam notes the importance of the qualification - Bhagavatpradhana, for the person who is requested to narrate stories of Lord Hari. Only a Bhagavat pradhana, can effectively tell about Bhagavan just as only a good musician can impart melodious music. Vazhakunnam also denounces the habit of certain so called bhaktas who invite their relatives to perform Bhagavata saptahas so that the money does not go out of their kith and kin, and they feel hollow pride of having gained holiness.

Now on how Vazhakunnam wrote the commentary - It was on a Sivaratri day in 1943 that Vazhakunnam started to write this commentary of Bhagavata. Sankaranarayanan, his son had been the scribe for the commentary to the first two slokas.<sup>14</sup> But later it was his brothers who acted as scribes.

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12. Ibid, p.341.

13. Srimadbhagavatam (1,18,15), ibid., p.334.

14. O. Sankaranarayanan Nambudiri, Bhaktasiraomani, op.cit.

On everyday the writing of the commentary started from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. Vazhakunnam would be ready by 6 a.m. and would wait for the scribe. While waiting, he would be going through the relevant literatures. Till 2 p.m. he would be going through the fair copy of the matter written on the day. After that Vazhakunnam would look into the slokas and relevant literature to be commented on the following day.<sup>15</sup>

In Brhannaradiyapuram, Sage Sanaka advises Narada:-

“सत्यं वच्मि हितं वच्मि सारं वच्मि पुनः पुनः

असारेस्मिंस्तु संसारे सत्यं हरिसमर्चनम्”<sup>16</sup>

Vazhakunnam has absorbed the essence of this advice. And he wrote the commentary of Bhagavata as though to propagate this message. His commentary that has become satyam hitam and saram has been dedicated as Harisamarchanam.

Thus Vazhakunnam also became a fragrant sweet flower in the vanamala of the book form Krishna, the other flowers of the garland being Bopadeva, Madhusudana Sarasvati, Sridharachariar, P. Gopalan Nair, Vaisravanath Raman Nambudiri etc.

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15. Ibid., p.189.

16. Brhannaradiyapuram, Part-I, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Alahabad, 1979, V: 34-10, p.220.

## CHAPTER IX

### DEVOTIONAL SONGS OF VAZHAKUNNAM

The poet in Vazhakunnam did not restrict his creations to composing poetry in Sanskrit metre. He extended his creative talents in producing poetry in bhasha metre also. Probably he would have realised that it highly endears the masses devoid of formal education. Being a great devotee himself these songs are rich in devotion. Many of his devotional songs have been got by heart by the people, who recite them constantly as part of their daily prayers. So this separate chapter is desired for highlighting such devotional songs. They can be enlisted as follows:

1. Hara Sankara .....
2. Bhagavatamenna teevandi .....
3. Vanambadippakshi.....
4. Peelicartimalacutti.....
5. Pratinavageerum.....
6. Vadiyorulkkalattamara.....
7. Kalluveno neelaniram.....
8. Nigamatrayanilayadhipa.....

The first in the list namely Hara Sankara..... is a song consisting of 22 lines. It is prefixed as the benedictory verse in the work Srimadbhagavatasangraham Athava Vasudevanandini of

Vazhakunnam.<sup>1</sup> The next in the list is the last song given under the title Bhagavatatteevandi in the same work. The next song beginning with Vanambadippakshi..... has been prefixed to the work Ramakathasudha of Vazhakunnam.<sup>2</sup> The song starting with Peelichurti..... is given as benediction at the beginning of Bhagavatamakarandam of the poet.<sup>3</sup> The next song Pratinavageerum..... has been prefixed to Vazhakunnam's work Tiruvallakkavile Ormakkurippukal.<sup>4</sup> The next song is seen as mangalam to the famous Malayalam drama of Vazhakunnam, Rugmini by name.<sup>5</sup> The song Kalluveno neelaniram..... is given under the caption Neelakkallu in the Laghubhagavatam (bhasha) of Vazhakunnam.<sup>6</sup> The song Nigamatrayanilayadhipa..... is another song of Vazhakunnam which is not included in any of his works. It is seen printed in a loose sheet of paper.

#### **Hara Sankara....<sup>7</sup>**

The prayer starting with the words Hara Sankara, containing

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1. See chapter VI - Malayalam works of Vazhakunnam. p. 170

2. Ibid. p. 159.

3. Ibid. p. 160.

4. Ibid. p. 155.

5. Ibid. p. 180.

6. Ibid. p. 161.

7. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Srimadbhagavatasangraham Athava Vasudevanandini, Gita Press, Trichur, 1972, initial pages.

22 lines is among the masterpiece songs of Vazhakunnam. It has been so popular that it can be heard chanted devotionally among the evening prayers from many a house in Kerala even to this day. The song addresses Lord Siva, deity of Tiruvegappura temple situated near Vazhakunnam Mana, the native house of the poet. In this the poet entreats Lord Siva to purify him and also to bless him with a life in Krishna's servitude. This also throws light on his preferential attachment to Lord Krishna. The desires of the devotee in this prayer are of high standard and never go down to materialistic demands. For example he prays for elimination of rebirths and for sustenance of love for Krishna.

People have liked this song specially not only on account of its excellence in prayers but also because of its recitational flow, the sweetness of the words employed and the ease of its construction. His mastery of poetic composition stands whether the language be Malayalam or Sanskrit. Among the Malayalam lines he interweaves Sanskrit ones as follows:-

“मरणार्णवतरणप्लवमरुणांबुजसुभगं

चरणं 'तिरुजवसत्सुरवर' ते मम शरणं”

‘Tirujavasatpura’ means Tiruvegappura. One can rarely see Sanskrit poets writting in bhasha metre.

The last couplet contains a colophon regarding the poet

“कदलीगिरिधरणीसुरभणितं बहुफलदं

मुर्लीधरचरणांबुजरतिदं शृणु तदिदम्”

Here Kadaleegiri denotes the house name of the poet namely Vazhakunnam. The work 'Hara Sankara' was written at Tonnallur. It was written on a Sivaratri day in the year 1938 or '39. It was Venmani Nambudiripad who copied it when Vazhakunnam chanted it - Vazhakunnam Sankaranarayanan, son of the poet has mentioned.<sup>8</sup>

**Bhagavatamenna teevandi....**<sup>9</sup> The song beginning with the line Bhagavatamenna teevandi has been given the caption Bhagavatateevandi. Under a unique imagination the poet metaphorically considers Bhagavata as a train. Corresponding to the twelve Skandhas the train has twelve compartments. The characters in the Skandhas are the passengers in the respective compartments. The train moves along the long shore of worldly life and has as its destination Vaikundha, the abode of Lord Vishnu. Anybody who gains a ticket from Guruvayurappa can get admitted into the train. The first compartment is occupied by Suta, Saunaka, Narada, Vyasa, Bhishma in the arrowful berth, Vidura, Gandhari, Kunti, Pandavas etc. including Uttara and her new born baby. Srisuka is driver of the train and Vyasa is the guard. The train moves according to the guard's flag signal. At the next station the second compartment is opened for the passengers like Brahma. The train stops next at Kalindi, the third station from where

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8. Sankaranarayanan, Bhaktasiromani (Life and Reminiscences), op.cit., p.187.

9. See Vasudevanandini, op.cit., p.200-204.

Uddhava meets Vidura and they together get in the third compartment. At each station new passengers get in. The tenth compartment is reserved for sweet little Krishna, his friends and relatives. Krishna also gets into the eleventh and twelfth compartments. K.P. Narayana Pisharodi in appreciation of the same states that the poet has summerised the whole of Bhagavata in these 58 couplets.<sup>10</sup> The subject matter of this poem will be of genuine interest to critics having a post modern perspective.

### **Vanambadippakshi.....<sup>11</sup>**

The caption for this song is Sri Guruvayurappanodu. In the first twenty six lines the poet introduces a chain of suggestions in which Guruvayurappa is conceived as cream of things of the world like the song of the nightingale, moon come down to earth, the sweetness of honey, the blue flower blossomed on the creeper of music, and so on. It is a fine example of prolonged figure of speech Utpreksha. In the last four lines the poet expects the blessings of the Lord in his proposed attempt for the writing of Ramakathasudha. The song is an excellent piece of Malayalam poetry pleasing even the common man.

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10. K.P. Narayana Pisharoti, Bhaktapriya, Guruvayur Devasvom, Guruvayur, Aug '90. p.13.

11. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Ramakathasudha, Mangalodayam Press, Trichur, 1924, initial pages.

### **Peelicutimalacutti....<sup>12</sup>**

This is a benedictory song juxtaposed at the start of the work Bhagavatamakarandam of Vazhakunnam. The tune is that of a folk-song known as Kurattippattu. The poet draws a beautiful portrait of little Krishna. It seems that the poet wants to serve a sample having the same taste as that of the main feast to be served through Bhagavatamakarandam.

### **Pratinavageerum....<sup>13</sup>**

This is a short prayer desiring for the blessings of the presiding deity of Tiruvullakkavu as well as the blessings of the Lord of Guruvayur for the successful completion of the work - Tiruvullakkavile Ormakkurippukal. Even though this song is limited to eight lines it is an excellent example for the masterly poetic talents. Herein is seen the harmonious communion of select words and spontaneous flow of poetry.

### **Vadiyorulkkalattamara....<sup>14</sup>**

This is a short philosophical song containing fourteen lines. Lord Krishna is seen as the operator of different plans, that are

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12. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Bhagavatamakarandam, Mangalodayam Press, Trichur, 1924, pp. 1,2.

13. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Tiruvullakkavile Ormakkurippukal, Mangalodayam Press, Trichur, 1939, p.1.

14. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Rukmini, Sree Krishna Press, Trichur, 1945. p.1.

essential for the sustenance of the world. The Lord takes form to protect his devotees and to punish the wrong doers.

**Kalluvenoneelaniram.....<sup>15</sup>**

This is a very beautiful and popular song in twenty two lines under the caption Neelakkallu. Vazhakunnam assumes the role of gem-seller. The gem is the bright blue sapphire which represents mild Krishna metaphorically. The mine that supplied the gem is the womb of Devaki. This gem longed for by the Gods adorns the breasts of Mahalakshmi. The same gem is brought by Pandagopa from Vasudeva in exchange of Durga. The gem shines as a pendant in the garland in which the gopas are the pearls. The gem not only adds external beauty but also enhances internal bliss.

Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri is highly proud of acting the role of the distributor of such a unique gem among the people. And it is his prayer to take up this role. We really find him doing it most sincerely throughout his life. The people on their part welcomed this gem seller and tried to own this gem at any cost.

**Nigamatrayanilayadhipa.....<sup>16</sup>**

This song under the caption Sripurnatrayisastuti is written during

15. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Laghubhagavatam (Moolam-bhasha), Kamalalaya Printing Works, Thiruvananthapuram, initial pages.

16. Published in a loose sheet of paper

the same time of Hara Sankara ..... We find a beautiful blending of selected words so as to add to its musical effect. It is interesting to note that the poet had rendered the lines of song in simple Sanskrit. The song starts with the lines:-

“निगमत्रयनिलयाधिप निखिलेश्वर कुरु मां  
निगमद्रुमफलवर्णनरसनं त्वयि रसिकं  
शिशिरीकृतसकलश्रुति मुरलीरवमधुना  
दिश नन्दज ! चरणेतव सुदृढां रतिमधुना”

The first word indicates the ruling deity Purnatrayisa of Tripunithura. A Sanskrit song composed in a non Sanskrit metre as this, is rarely seen. The colophon ‘कदलीगिरिधरणीसुरभणितम्’ given in the penultimate line corroborates the poet’s identity. This song though published does not form the part of any of the poet’s books.

Guru Nanak of Punjab, Ekanath of Maharashtra, Narasimhamehta of Gujarat and Sankaradeva of Assam are among the great saint singers of India..<sup>17</sup> The Keralite Vazhakunnam too belongs to this esteemed tradition.

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17. See: Dr. V. Raghavan, The Great Integrators - The Saint Singers of India, Publications Division, New Delhi, 1979.pp. 115-143.

## CHAPTER X

### MUKTAKAS AND SUKTAS OF VAZHAKUNNAM

It will not do proper justice to the great soul of Vazhakunnam if a word is not mentined regarding the muktakas and suktas composed by him.

#### MUKTAKAS

Once Vazhakunnam who was at Othalur Mana felt an intense desire to go to Guruvayur. But he was in poor health. So he composed a sloka as a message to Lord Guruvayurappa and sent it through Venmani Kuttan Nambudiripad, his disciple, who had been there to see him. Vazhakunnam recited the lines and Venmani wrote them down. Venmani remembers the exact date of the composition of this sloka - 18th Karkidakam, 1110 (in Malayalam era). The sloka is as follows:<sup>1</sup>

“इष्टैर्वियुक्तः स्वजनैश्च मुक्तः

कष्टंगतस्तावकदासमानी

दूरेवसन् खिद्यति दीनदीनो

मरुत्पूराधीश कृपा कुतस्ते”

Vazhakunnam's ability in making slokas speedly and easily

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1. Venmani Kuttan Nambudiripad, Smarana, Bhaktasiromani (Life and Reminiscences), Bharatavilasam, Trichur, 1949, p.185.

most appropriate to the situation can be evidenced from this context.

The following sloka was composed and dictated to Venmani Kuttan Nambudiripad by Vazhakunnam in the year 1942, at the close of one of his Bhagavata expositions.<sup>2</sup>

“तवास्तु मे जीवितमेवतुष्ट्यै  
ममास्तु शौरे तव पाददास्यं  
भक्तिस्सदास्तु त्वयि मय्यजस्रं  
बुद्धिर्मदीयोयमितीश तेस्तु”

One more sloka was composed by Vazhakunnam during the same occasion.<sup>3</sup>

“सन्तानाद्यात्मशत्रुव्रजजननपदात्  
कामिनीकाम्यमानात्  
चिन्तारत्नोपमानं नरपशुभिरिहा-  
पुण्यतो गण्यमानात्  
सन्तापानान्निदानात् मदनमुखगदै-  
रन्वहं सीदतां नः  
कान्तादिप्रेमतोपीश्वर ! तवचरण-  
प्रेममान्यं सदस्तु”

### OTHER SLOKAS

In the year 1927, Vazhakunnam had written a couple of slokas to be given to Chittirattirunal Maharaja of

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2. Ibid., p.186.

3. Ibid., p.186.

Thiruvananthapuram. The slokas follow:

“यद्भक्ता विदितात्मानो  
मोदिताशेषजन्तवः  
जिताशा विजिताशाश्च  
राजसिंहासने स्थिताः  
तस्यश्रीपद्मनाभस्य  
पादपङ्कजरेणवः  
शरणीकरणीयास्ते  
बालगोपालरूपिणः”

‘Bow before the feet of that Padmanabha, by whose grace the former kings of this throne were able to win and rule their kingdoms to the best of the satisfaction of the people.’ The king was very pleased to go through the lines and so he granted an amount of Rs.101/- to the poet, who was financially in a pitiable condition.<sup>4</sup>

The following sloka is often heard from the tongues of the devotees of Guruvayurappa:

“पीतांबरं करविराजितशंखचक्र-  
कौमोदकीसरसिजं करुणासमुद्रं  
राधासहायमति सुन्दरमन्दहासं  
वातालयेशमनिशं हृदि भावयामि”

This sloka is found repeatedly quoted in many a spiritual periodical like Sri Guruvayurappan, though it is not found attributed to any poet. But there is a firm belief that the author of the poem is none other than Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri. His devotion to Lord Guruvayurappa and his ability in writing

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4. *Ibid.*, p.184.

simple and sweet verses point at a sharper inclination in favour of his authorship. It is sad and unfortunate that many valuable evidences are not stored for later generations interested to study poets and their literature.

### SUKTAS

Vazhakunnam has many suktas to his credit. Here a few samples have been listed so as to get a taste of them.

1. Do not give way for death. Consider calamities as relatives. Also keep a name of god with you.<sup>5</sup>
2. Devotion to god is nothing but washing away the selfish tendencies in the ocean of supreme love for god.<sup>6</sup>
3. Nothing excels diligence in vitalising blood.<sup>7</sup>
4. The ideal of a jealous man will be to bar others' progress.<sup>8</sup>
5. To culture the creeper of devotion, it is a must to safeguard the strength of its encircling wall made of respect for the good.<sup>9</sup>

A detailed list of the suktas of Vazhakunnam has been given separately in the book *Bhaktasiromani* (Life and reminiscences).<sup>10</sup> These inspiring words can touch and lead many in distress and difficulties.

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5. *Ibid.*, p.221.

6. *Ibid.*, p.223.

7. *Ibid.*, p.220.

8. *Ibid.*, p.220.

9. *Ibid.*, pp.225-6.

10. *Ibid.*, pp.219-226.

## VAZHAKUNNAM AS A RELIGIOUS REFORMER

Every religion has its own conventions to be observed in individual life. There are high principles that are part and parcel of it. In accordance with these principles there are rituals and obligatory rules and regulations prescribed for a successful religious life. The sad and unfortunate aspect with respect to religion is that in the course of time, the principles are either lost or misunderstood and rituals deteriorated into meaningless observances and the common man was kept away from the understanding of true religion. Many of the spiritual leaders have detected the flaws and by example and precept tried to reform the people at large. The names of such great religious reformers like Sri Sankara, Swami Vivekananda, Dayananda Sarasvati, Maharshi Aurobindo etc. are well recognised at national as well as international levels. Among the recent Keralite religious reformers are Sri Narayanaguru and Cattambi Swamikal. Dr. K. Kunjunni Raja has rightly pointed out the name of Vazakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri along with Sri Narayanaguru and Cattambi Swamikal, while mentioning about the contribution of Keralite religious reformers to Sanskrit literature. He observes,<sup>1</sup> "It is only in the field

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1. Dr. K. Kunjunni Raja, *The Contribution of Kerala to Sanskrit literature*, University of Madras, 80, p.274.

of devotional literature that Sanskrit seems to hold part of its original influence and popularity.”

Swami Vivekananda's suggestion for the emancipation of Indians is certainly a guideline for those serving in this field,<sup>2</sup> “So every improvement in India requires first of all an upheaval in religion. Before flooding India with socialistic or political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ideas. The first work that demands our attention is, that of the most wonderful truths confined in our upanishads, in our scriptures, in our puranas - must be brought out from the books, brought out from the monasteries brought out from the forests, brought out from the possession of selected bodies of people, and scattered broadcast all over the land, so that these truths may run like fire all over the country, from north to south, and east to west from Himalayas to Camorin, from Sindh to Brahmaputra.”

From the words of Swami Vivekananda it is clear that reforms in the religious field is the most primary one and social and political reforms are only secondary ones. And so the urgent need of the people in India is obviously the reformation in the spiritual field. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri rightly chose his path while he enlightened the people with teachings based on Indian culture and heritage. To elevate their level of life he pro-

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2. Swami Vivekananda, My plan of compaign, To the Youth of India, Advaita Asrama, Mayavati 1980, pp.67-68.

jected the life pictures of exemplary characters from Indian classics in general and puranic literature in particular. To make the ideas easily digestible for the lay man, he mixed the same with novel literature of recent litterateurs. Thus one could often hear references to stories of Tagore, poems of Ezhuttacchan and Puntanam, Sankeertana possessions of Caitanya and the like.

“A religious educator is particularly concerned with the spiritual dimension of personal life” says Raymond Holley, the great English scholar in religious studies.<sup>3</sup> He adds that by attaining religious education, one must be able to consider in an academic way religious beliefs, practices, festivals, buildings, texts, music gestures and social behaviour from the standpoint of particular scholarly disciplines. It is both to be able to think religiously about every day affairs and to think scholarly about religious phenomena.<sup>4</sup> The words of Raymond Holley best suits Vazhakunnam. He always developed his characters particularly the puranic ones to suit the present day generation. He explained meanings and gave illustrations, wherever necessary. He was a religious educator in the real sense of the word.

The historian has as his focus those events or symbolic practices in past time in which the religious believers have probably involved themselves. The philosophers of religion is concerned to

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3. Raymond Holley, *Religious education and religious understanding*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1978, p.141.

4. *Ibid.* p. 145-46.

examine and clarify intellectually the meaning of religious views and statements, the significant logic of religious activities and the like. Whether he be a historian, sociologist, philosopher, psychologist, he employs his procedures, tools and investigative ability to search the truth within his own branch of study or area of specialisation. The religious scholar like Vazhakunnam was concerned with all connected directly or indirectly with religion - religious texts, doctrines, beliefs, etc. The scholar of religion is just like any other scholar, in his objectivity with the difference that he focusses his attention on the religious symbols, aspects and concepts, which are of interest to his branch of scholarship. Vazhakunnam had been making his own contribution throughout his life and his field was religion.

He was invited for giving discourses at various centres in Kerala like Thiruvananthapuram, Tripunithura, Trichur, Tiruvegappura, Kozhikode, Kodungallur, Kadathanattu etc. in addition to Guruvayur. His lectures were arranged even at places like Madras and Bombay. Thus apart from the Keralites, devotees belonging to other parts of the nation were also benefitted by his speeches and teachings. The warm welcome given to his discourses throughout Kerala and outside was a recognition of his being a national religious reformer. Ottur Unni Nambudiripad has described Vazhakunnam as the well appreciated preacher inside and outside Kerala for more than two decades.<sup>5</sup>

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5. Ottur Unni Nambudiripad, op.cit. p.1.

Vazhakunnam has been fortunate that he has not been owned or projected by any particular caste or sect. Unlike many other so called religious reformers Vazhakunnam was endeared by all sections of the society, irrespective of caste or creed. In one of his public speeches conducted on behalf of Tilak Samaj, Tiruvegappura, Vazhakunnam had given a talk on the need of independence from foreign rule. It was a political stage presided over by Trippekkulangara Vasudevan Nambudiri. Vazhakunnam applied the puranic story of Prahlada in the then current politics. He characterised the British rulers as the tyrant Hiranyakasipu. He wanted the people to fight against the tyranny like Prahlada, who organised a determined group against the despotic orders. People were so convinced and as Vazhakunnam directed they uttered the very name of the Lord that inspired Prahlada. The assemblage included not only members from other castes but also from other religions like Islam.<sup>6</sup> This incident reveals Vazhakunnam's commanding power, urge for independence and his secular outlook.

Ulloor has admitted that it was Vazhakunnam and others like him, who kept blazing the sacred lamp of Indian culture and wisdom from the foreign attempts to deflake it.<sup>7</sup>

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6. Taccappilli Govindamenon, *op.cit.* pp.152-53.

7. Ulloor, KSC, Vol. V, Dept. of Publications, University of Kerala, Dec. 65, pp.255-56.

Vazhakunnam's secularism is evident from the speeches delivered before an audience exceeding thousand in number at Kozhikode. He declared before the public that the essence of all religions are the same. He pointed out the need of upliftment of lower castes reminding the audience of the literature of C.F. Andrews. The speech that took place in October 1924 was flashed by Malayalam dailies like Manorama.<sup>8</sup>

Vazhakunnam, unlike many other religious reformers, never condemned or blamed other religions, remarks - Taccappilli Govindamenon.<sup>9</sup>

Even in his commentary on the Bhagavata sloka (1,2,11), he has clearly recorded his secular outlook. He says that God is called by different names by different people who fail to recognise that all names are of the same God. He analyses this as the reason for the bloodshed in the name of religion. He speaks out, "Oh, foolish man, stop cutting the throat of others, agitated on hearing different names used for God."<sup>10</sup>

Thus Vazhakunnam was a religious reformer in the real sense

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8. Venmani Kuttan Nambudiripad, Preface Ramakathasudha of Vazhakunnam, Mangalodayam, Trichur, pp.3,4.

9. Taccappilli Govindamenon, op.cit. p.150.

10 Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Srimadbhagavatam (with Malayalam commentary), Mangalodayam, Trichur, p.24.

of the word, who saw man beyond the barriers of caste, sect or religion.

Many persons got inspiration to spiritual ideas from the words of Vazhakunnam. A.V. Govindamenon thankfully remembers Vazhakunnam whose words had changed his view and instilled aptitude for Bhagavata.<sup>11</sup> He clearly states his own experiences with Vazhakunnam in one of his published articles. He also mentions of having witnessed many other individuals transformed by having constantly listened to Vazhakunnam. People who were highly attracted by his words would constantly request Vazhakunnam to continue his speeches for many more days. Once at Tellicherry, Vazhakunnam who had thought initially to deliver lecture for two days had to stay there for giving talks for two weeks, due to the respectful compulsion of the people there. Vazhakunnam's pratishta, bhakti, respect for all religions, fluency in Malayalam language and such other qualities attracted the people - observes A.V. Govindamenon. Ulloor finds two reasons why speeches of Vazhakunnam impressed the public. One is that he mixed the speech with humour causing sustained voluntary attention. The second reason is that he cited incidents from the then current politics by which people accepted him as a practical guide.<sup>12</sup> The words of Raymond Holley is noteworthy in this context.

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11. A.V. Govindamenon, Smaranakal, Bhaktasiromani, op.cit. pp.93-94.

12. Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer, op.cit., pp.253-54.

According to him a religious educator, “may on occasions advert to the moral dimension, historic dimension, aesthetic dimension or even the political dimension of life..”<sup>13</sup> The words of this foreign scholar of religious studies suit Vazhakunnam as well.

For the propagation of his spiritual, moral and religious ideas Vazhakunnam did not confine to stages within the temple. He made use of public stages inside and outside Kerala. He had been lecturing not only on Bhagavata concepts but also on other topics of public interest to give them proper guidance in their path of life.

Vazhakunnam had the firm belief that women in India have a very important role in the society. He emphasised the need of imparting education to Indian women. Quoting the story of rahlada, he said that it was from his mother Kayadhu’s womb that he had his first lessons of education. Venmani in his preface to Ramakathasudha (p.5) has pointed out. According to Vazhakunnam the education given to the mother is a pre-requisite for the education of the child.

Vazhakunnam has re-constructed several ideal puranic characters through his dramas like Subhadra, Rugmini etc. By this method he could draw very clear pictures in the minds of the ordinary people. Otherwise these characters would not have

. Raymond Holley, op.cit., p.141.

come down to their daily life, standing as models for them to imitate or follow. Vazhakunnam knew the best medium to influence the minds of the people at large.

Vazhakunnam has created highly attractive and touching prayers in bhasha metre. So many Hindu houses do even now chant these kirtanas while offering prayers to the gods. This had a tremendous effect of doing away with petty quarrels and bringing in peace and harmony in the hearts of those chanting and hearing. Even the little tender lips echoed the lines along with their parents. As an example, the prayer starting with “Hara Sankara Siva Sankara.....”, propitiating the God, given as the opening verse in Vasudevanandini can be cited.<sup>14</sup>

The word pictures of Vazhakunnam on the stage as focussed from different angles by the great scholars and poets are really colourful. Vatakkumkur says that Vazhakunnam had the mastery of words, which emphatically attracted people of all types. He adds that his Malayalam prose style was spontaneous, pleasing and easily absorbable.<sup>15</sup> Ulloor S. Paramesvara Iyer remarks about Vazhakunnam; “Kerala has not witnessed an orator like

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14. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Vasudevanandini, Gita Press, Trichur, 1971, pp.1, ii.

15. Vatakkumkur Raja Raja Varma Raja, Kerala Sahitya Charitram (Charchayum Pooranavum) Part II, Mangolodayam, Trichur, June 1968, pp.504-505.

him in recent times, who can talk so touchingly in Malayalam language.<sup>16</sup> Puttezhath Raman Menon, the famous Malayalam scholar, who used to accompany Vazhakunnam, says that it was azhakunnam who changed his talk based on Bhagavata interpretations into a supreme art and a well planned and developed method for the purification of the hearts. He admires azhakunnam's ability in attracting people from far and wide.<sup>17</sup> Iruvullakkavil Soolapani Variyar says that Vazhakunnam through his Krishnaleelapracharana has kept up the peace of the world at a time when it was being disintegrated.<sup>18</sup> Taccappilli Govindamenon has described how Vazhakunnam could lead a large number of people along a street chanting Lord's name loudly in chorus at Bombay, where usually the very speaking of Malayalam was viewed with contempt.<sup>19</sup> Here we find a social reformer in action getting public participation at hand. This reminds one of Swami Vivekananda who spoke, "In India, religious life forms the centre, the key note of the whole music of national life."<sup>20</sup>

Once, Vazhakunnam had been referring to Vilvamangalam in

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- 1. Ulloor, op.cit., 252-54.
  - 2. Puttezhath Raman Menon, Smaranakal, Bhaktasiromani, op.cit. pp.95-108.
  - 3. Soolapani Variyar, Ibid. p.116.
  - 4. Taccappilli Govindamenon, op.cit., p.165.
  - 5. Swami Vivekananda, op.cit., p.66.

one of his speeches at the Koottampāla of Vadakkunnatha Kshetra, Trichur. One among the audience reported that the place of samadhi of Vilvamangalam was nearby. Vazhakunnam was very happy to visit the particular spot at the end of the session, followed by all those who had assembled there. The marching of the people in absolute silence astonished the spectators on either side of the street.<sup>21</sup> The people realised that Vazhakunnam was a religious reformer not only in theory but also in practice. His thought and action went always hand in hand and this enhanced the people's respect for him.

In his early days of life while he had failed in his attempts against poverty he had prayed to the deity at Kodungallur temple, "Mother, kindly enable me to live in service of humanity or bring my life to termination. Kindly take the decision within this mandala period itself."<sup>22</sup> Yes he was blessed to serve the humanity throughout his life. He has been a torch bearer to many a wavering mind, many a spiritual inquirer, many a suffering heart and to many a disappointed hope-lost soul.

Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri, who later became an ardent devotee of Lord Krishna, was highly influenced and inspired by the life and teachings of great devotees like Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri - observes Unnikrishnan Puthur.<sup>23</sup> Ottur

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21. Taccappilli Govindamenon, op.cit., p.151.

22. Taccappilli Govindamenon, ibid. p.145.

23. Unnikrishnan Puthur, Tirunamacaryan Anjam Tirumeni, Mathrubhumi Printing and Publishing Company Limited, Calicut, 1988.

Unni Nambudiripad started conducting Bhagavata discourses on being encouraged, directed and guided by Vazhakunnam.<sup>24</sup> Patirisseri Damodaran Nambudiri remembers one of the occasions when Vazhakunnam was invited for giving a lecture at Alleppey. Among others on the stage were Vallattol Narayanan Menon, the great Malayalam poet. Vazhakunnam too had supported Vallattol in his view on a topic connected with religion. The people were attracted so much by the speech of Vazhakunnam that they repeatedly requested him to prolong the speech for one more hour after the prescribed time.<sup>25</sup> Vazhakunnam's ability as a religious reformer is obvious here.

"In essence all religions mean the same. If leaders of all religions assembled together a resolution would be passed to this effect" Vazhakunnam had said in one of his speeches at Calicut.<sup>26</sup> He was a religious reformer with love for all religions alike. He so lived as a religious reformer in the real sense of the word.

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24. See C. Sreekumaran, M.Phil thesis, Contribution of Ottur Unni Nambudiripad to Sanskrit Literature, submitted to the University of Calicut in 1992, p.9.

25. Patirisseri Damodaran Nambudiri, Annatte Prasangam, Bhaktasiromani, op.cit., p.127.

26. Quoted in Bhaktasiromani, op.cit., p.237.

## CHAPTER XII

### VAZHAKUNNAM, AS A NATIONAL INTEGRATOR

While writing on the contribution of saint singers, Dr.V.Raghavan, rightly points out how the integration fostered by them becomes all round, "First of all, by bringing ancient wisdom to the common folk and propagating widely among them the teachings, they harmonised the earlier learned tradition with what they preached : the tradition enshrined in the Sanskrit sacred books - the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita, the itihasapuranas and the sastras - with their own outpourings in the local spoken languages."<sup>1</sup> These words seem to be much suitable for Vazhakunnam. He has been sincerely and consciously trying to bring out the ancient wisdom to the common folk, by all means he could as an exponent and commentator of Bhagavata, poet, dramatist etc. He has been travelling through out the length and breadth of the nation to realise this goal of propagation of ancient wisdom. He selected as the medium his mother tongue Malayalam. In addition, his determination to store the ancient wisdom for the future generations materialised as his contribution to Malayalam and Sanskrit literature.

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1. Dr. V. Raghavan, the Great Integrators : The Saint Singers of India, Publication division, Government of India, New Delhi, 1979, p.30.

The common people have been integrated to a considerable extent by the religious discourses, dramas and poems into which they get attracted irrespective of sex, education, caste and the like. They studied moral lessons from the stories of epics and puranas. The great saints of India have played a very important role in the propagation of puranic culture, moral and spiritual education, traditional knowledge and Indian heritage among the people of the various parts of the nation. The temples were mainly the centres selected by these saints for attracting the people through explanations, expressions, descriptions, recitations and demonstrations based on topics, characters, stories and legends palatable to the common man. Vazhakunnam too belongs to this array of great saints. Guruvayur temple was the main centre that he chose for the purpose, even though he had given lectures at many other religious centres.

Vazhakunnam's talks had a special characteristic in bringing forth the concept of emotional unity in the hearts of the Indians. He often quoted lines from the lives and situations of great men. Thus Tagore and Vyasa found place in the hearts of his audience in South India, when Ezhuttacchan and Puntanam were recognised and respected by those in the North. By understanding more and more of the great poets, scholars and ideas of other parts of the nation, people at large could develop in them love and respect for other parts of the country, and in this way gradually a feeling of emotional unity and oneness was created in them. Thus Vazhakunnam's role in this field is highly commendable.

Another important aspect is the inspiration Vazhakunnam instilled in the people to pray God, whom he preferred to call as Hari. Thus belief in God became for them a medium of unification and this added to the solidarity of the devotees. The southern and northern devotees loved and respected each other irrespective of their geographical origin. The realisation of the fatherhood of God and commonness of heritage enhanced the brotherly feeling leading to integration. To propagate the supremacy of god among the fellowmen, Vazhakunnam, selected stories and situations mainly from the two great sacred texts Srimadbhagavatam and Mahabharatam. These books that have outlived time and space, he felt, provided sufficient documentary evidences to prove his concept of God, who is beyond the limitations of time and space. Though Vazhakunnam himself was an ardent devotee of Krishna, he has written prayers on Bhagavati, Ayyappa and Sri Rama which throws light on his view of God beyond name and form. As one of the great bhakta poet Tirumoolar puts it:

“To one family doth mankind belong  
And its God is one and one only”<sup>2</sup>

These lines do induce a feeling of oneness in the hearts of the people.

Stage arts like Kathakali, Ashtapadiyattom, Bharrathanatyam etc. that originated from the different states catch the attention and

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2. Quoted by S. Maharajan, Tirumoolar, Devotional Poets and Mystics, Part I, Publications divisions, New Delhi, 1983, p.15.

admiration of all Indian art lovers irrespective of their nativity or regionalism. These artistic performances and music appeal to the hearts of the people and help to bring forth a feeling of emotional unity. Like them, the songs of the saint singers and the verses of the devotional poets touch the hearts of the people irrespective of geographical limitations. They cleanse human mind. They promote tolerance, humanitarian concepts and bring about harmony among the people. For example:

“He prayeth best who loveth best

All things both great and small” - Tulsidas.<sup>3</sup>

“कदनीगिरिधरणीसुरभणितं बहुफलदं

मुरलीधरचरणांबुजरतिदं शृणु तदिदम्”

-Vazhakunnam<sup>4</sup>

"Dwelling in me as my life, won't it be moral for thee  
to wipe off sorrow from my mind? My mind knows  
only to think of Thy graceful face of intense beauty"

-Tayumanavar<sup>5</sup>

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3. Quoted by Madan Gopal, Tulasidas, Ramayana Mahabharata and Bhagavata writers, Publications division, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 1981, p.114.
  4. Vazhakunnam, Mangalam, Srimadbhagavatasangraham, Gita Press, Trichur, 1972, initial pages.
  5. Quoted by S. Sachidanandan Pillai, Tayumanavar, Devotional poets and Mystics, Part-II, Pub. Division, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 1991, p.124.

"The drums beat  
     The conch blew  
 'Neath the pearl-decked  
     Wedding place  
 Madhusudan, my Lord,  
     The hope of all,  
 He came, and I dreamt  
     That he held my hand"

Andal<sup>6</sup>

Telugu Kirtans of Tyagaraja, lyrics of Mira, Ramayana of Tulsidas and devotional prayers of Andal or Tayumanavar are carried from place to place by the song lovers and devotees. In the heart of the Malayalam devotee we find the lines of Vazhakunnam or Ottur Unni Nambudiripad. The Malayalee takes it wherever he goes. The people of other states accept it just as we accept the poems of Mira and Andal. So the devotional songs are accepted by people nationwide irrespective of the limitations of languages. Vazhakunnam, the poet, by having written a good number of devotional songs, verses and prayers has contributed to this emotional unification.

"Vazhakunnam by going through Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhrapradesh etc. with his stories on Guruvayurappa

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6. Quoted by Prema Nandakumar, *Andal, Devotional poets and Mystics Part-I*, Publications Division, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 1983, p.49.

won love and respect from all quarters. His journey throughout India was a victorious one” remarks Unnikrishnan Puthur, the great Malayalam writer.<sup>7</sup>

Vazhakunnam has been conducting pilgrimages to places like Madras and Bombay in addition to Kodungallur, Tellichery, Trichambaram etc. Along with him he took many devotees and disciples, irrespective of caste and class, who willingly accompanied him. This pilgrimage itself can be taken as a strong method of integration. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi:

“Our leading men travelled throughout India either on foot or bullock carts. They learnt one another’s languages and there was no aloofness between them” and he adds, “They taught us that those whose hearts were aglow with righteousness had the Ganga in their own homes. But they saw that India was one undivided land, so made by nature. They therefore argued that it must be one nation. Arguing thus they established holy places in various parts of India and fired the people with an idea of nationality in a manner unknown in other parts of the world.”<sup>8</sup>

We find Srimadbhagavatam speaking about the sanctity of pilgrimage of saints. The sages, moving from place to place purified the whole earth. They came there along with their disciples. Visiting the tirthas these holy men, instead of getting

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7. Unnikrishnan Puthur, Mathrubhumi Guruvayur Supplement, dated 15.2.'92, Mathrubhumi, Calicut, p.41.

8. Quoted by Dr. V. Raghavan, Op. cit p.34.

themselves purified, purify the tirthas. Among the sages who visited the banks of the Ganga from different parts of the country were Vasishta, Brigu, Angiras, Parasara, Viswamitra, Utathya, Pippalada, Maitreya, Chyavana, Agastya, Narada etc., whom Pareekshit welcomed whole heartedly.<sup>9</sup>

“तत्रोपजग्मुर्भूवनं पुनाना  
 महानुभावा मुनयः सशिष्याः  
 प्रायेण तीर्थाभिगमापदेशैः  
 स्वयं हि तीर्थानि पुनन्ति सन्तः  
 अत्रिर्वसिष्ठश्च्यवनः शरद्वा-  
 नरिष्टनेमिर्भृगुरंगिरश्च  
 पराशरोगाधिसुतोथ राम  
 उत्थय इन्द्रप्रमदेध्मवाहौ  
 मेधातिथिर्देवल आर्ष्टिषेणो  
 भारद्वाजो गौतमः पिप्पलादः  
 मैत्रेय और्वः कवषः कुंभयोनिः  
 द्वैपायनोभगवान् नारदश्च”

The fact that the custom of going to sacred places prevailed even in the Bhagavata period can be understood from this. Holy places have been promoters of integration of India. The bhagavata

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9. Srimadbhagavatam (with commentary by Vaisravanath Ramar Nambudiri) - I, 19, 8-10. Sreeguruvayurapan Sankeerthan Trust, Guruvayur, 1983, p.202.

culture would have influenced and enhanced the national feeling in Vazhakunnam.

K.M. Munshi rightly remarks, "The tirtha cult is a unique byproduct of Indian culture." He continues: "This vast movement carrying millions every year to visit sacred tirthas has had the greatest influence in strengthening the religious and cultural foundation of India, in bringing to every man and woman the consciousness of India's glorious past and in inducing a sense of sanctity of the motherland, unity among their children and turning their mind Godwards"<sup>10</sup>

Vazhakunnam was not merely theoretical. He understood the need of going around the motherland. He was always strict and sincere to his aim. His words and deeds coincided. The great Bhagavata exponent easily won admirers in different parts of the nation. It was due to their repeated requests that he visited these places again and again. He was a national integrator himself and he could convert many of his devotees and disciples accordingly. For example, he was a spiritual guide of Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri,<sup>11</sup> who himself caused emotional integration through his Bhagavatayajna and Narayanamayajna conducted at different

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10. K.M. Munshi, Supplementary Preface, *Immortal India* of J.H. Dave, Bharatiya Vidyabhavan, Bombay, 1970, p.x.

11. Quoted by Unnikrishnan Puthur, *Tirunamacaryan Anjan Tirumeni*, Mathrubhumi Printing & Pub. Comp., Calicut '88., p.124.

centres. Vazhakunnam inaugurated the opening session of Namayajna movement, organised by Nilakanthasadguru at Guruvayur oottupura on 27.12.1942.<sup>12</sup>

Vazhakunnam's words are striking; "India stands on dharma. A man who is devoid of truth and dharma is to be feared more than a serpent."<sup>13</sup> He tried to illustrate the evil tendencies of the modern world comparing them with Indian epic characters Duryodhana, Sakuni, Dussasana, Kamsa and the like.<sup>14</sup> As ideal characters he described Dharmaputra, Kuchela, Uddhava, Narada. He used Indian traditional and puranic concepts to develop his view, which would further help the Indians to create in them a feeling of common heritage. This would help national integration considerably.

The basic fields that hold Indians together are their culture, philosophy and spiritual heritage. Vazhakunnam by having selected his source materials and work area in these fields could easily win over his fellowmen irrespective of their region, language or creed. Knowingly or unknowingly, he acted the role of a great unifying force or a national integrator.

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12. Ibid., p.15.

13. Ibid., p.31.

14. Ibid., p.31.

## CHAPTER XIII

## CONCLUSION

A modest attempt has been made through the different chapters of this thesis in evaluating the various facets of the imposing personality of Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri. In such investigations it is highly likely that the researcher may be over influenced if he is in close contact with the hero. This chance is out of question in this case, since Vazhakunnam belonged to a previous generation. On the contrary, it is also probable that the hero is underestimated due to the researcher being unable to observe him at close quarters. This chance has been eliminated to the maximum extent by collecting information from the direct experiencers, disciples and family members of Vazhakunnam.

Vazhakunnam has been well known and unknown at the same time - well known for his Bhagavata oratory and unknown for his other excellences. This thesis will be justified if it has brought into light these unknown excellences of this Keralite genius.

Vyasa's latest composition Srimadbhagavatam was intended for the cultural reformation of the succeeding generations. What hinders the fruition of this aim is the communication gap caused due to the absence of Sanskrit scholarship of the present day. Vazhakunnam extracted the ideas of Vyasa from Sanskrit, dissolved them in Malayalam and distributed them among his brethren. He had the mastery of Sanskrit and Malayalam, prose or verse which was evident on his stages as well as pages.

One should take into consideration the special characteristics of the language of the poet's period, and the attitude of the society of that time for a proper appreciation of his literature. Many publish their works after repeated corrections. But Vazhakunnam did not have this habit. Again, his admirers were hasty to take afresh his writings for publication and in fact, during his short lifespan he could not devote sufficient time for a second perusal. These factors deserve due attention of the readers and critics of Vazhakunnam.

It is worth remembering that Vazhakunnam, before taking up his main role in the Guruvayur centre, acted in his feeder role of propagating Sanskrit. He had established a Sanskrit vidyalaya at his native place, and had functioned as a reputed teacher of the same.<sup>1</sup>

The secret of his popularity needs special mention. Usually devotional preachers lacked rational thinking and resorted to employment of sentimental hollow words. Vazhakunnam developed his speech step by step on rational foundation.<sup>2</sup> Besides he was not merely a story teller but was an exponent of philosophical concepts.<sup>3</sup> His secular outlook and humour also played their role in this connection.

Guruvayur temple thrived by Vazhakunnam and Vazhakunnam in turn enhanced his fame through it. It had been a centre of

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1. See Chapter. I.
2. See Unnikrishnan Puthur, Mathrubhumi Guruvayur Supplement, 15.2.1992, The Mathrubhumi Printing and Publishing Company Limited, Kozhikode, p.41.
3. See Bhaktasiromani, op.cit., pp. 248-249.

Bhagavata dharma since 16th century when Melputtur and Puntanam associated themselves with Guruvayur - N.V. Krishna Variyar has pointed out.<sup>4</sup>

Besides increasing the tribe of Bhagavata exhorters, he also initiated new growth of Bhagavata literature. In this context the introduction written by Vazhakunnam to the Malayalam poem work Muralinadam of Tamarasseri Krishnan Bhattathiri alias Murali is noteworthy<sup>5</sup>. The very title 'Murali' was awarded to this poet by Vazhakunnam himself, who was highly inspired by the sweet music, literature and devotional intensity of 'Muraliganam', which flowed from the poet's tongue itself during many a Saptaha occasion. The felicitational function had been solemnised on behalf of a large number of devotees at Guruvayur Kootampala.<sup>6</sup> Murali has rightly acknowledged the encouragement obtained from Vazhakunnam, for his literary activities. He has mentioned about it respectfully in two of his published works - Srikrnakathamrtam<sup>7</sup>

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4. See Prof. Anandakuttan, introduction to Srimadbhagavatasvadanam of Tattayoor Unni Nambudiripad, K. Ramamritam Kaliyappa Chettiar and Sons, Ernakulam, 1169, initial pages.
  5. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri, Introduction to Muralinadam of Tamarasseri Krishnan Bhattathiri, Mangalodayam, Trichur, 1109.
  6. C.P. Nair, Bhaktapriya, Guruvayur Devasvom, Guruvayur, Book-4, Vol-6, June 1989, p:55
  7. Tamarasseri Krishnan Bhattathiri, Srikrnakathamrtam, Norman Printing Bureau, Calicut, 1147, p.xxviii.

and Kapilopadesam.<sup>8</sup>

During his last days of life Vazhakunnam due to his illness could not give lengthy discourses at Guruvayur Kootampala. He would confine to a few slokas of Bhagavata and the audience at large would prostrate before Lord Guruvayurappa with their sincere prayer for his recovery. Parakkottu Valiya Vasudevan Nambudiri, one of the participants of that occasion remembers. This shows how deep and lasting his influence was on his audience. A beautiful idol of infant Krishna\* worshipped by Vazhakunnam at Othalur Mana during the last years of his life still attracts the people assembling there for his birthday celebrations.

Here it is appropriate to glance how his glory reverberated from the hearts of the intellectual community, consequent to his death. Vallattol Narayana Menon, the great Malayalam poet laments,

“ആവു, ഭാഗവതാനുഗാനപരനായ്-  
 കർണ്ണാമൃതാദിപ്രഭേ-  
 താവായ് ‘ബഭ്രുതശിരോമണി’ പ്രഥിതനാം  
 ശ്രീ വാഴകുനെങ്ങുപോയ്-  
 നീ വല്ലാതഴൽ തേടിടായ്ക മനമേ;  
 വാതാലയാധീശനാം  
 ദേവങ്കൽസ്തമയേ ലയിച്ചിതു, ടൽ വി-  
 ട്ടിക്കൊച്ചു പുന്താനവും!”

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8. Tamarasseri Krishnan Bhattathiri, Kapilopadesam, Karimbuzha Raman Memorial Press, Tiruvannur, Calicut, 83, p.11.

\* See p. 272

(Oh, where has he disappeared, he who was a singer of Bhagavata, the composer of Karnamruta, Bhaktasiromani ? Yes, this new Puntanam has become one with Lord Guruvayurappa)<sup>9</sup>

There is a firm belief among the people that if a man's date of birth and date of death coincides he will not have to take birth again. The fact that Vazhakunnam's dates of birth and death fall on 23<sup>rd</sup> April adds to the notion of devotees and his intimate friends that he has become one with Lord Guruvayurappa.

Ottur has written a poem 'Anjali' wherein he pictures him as Sri Ramakrishna of Guruvayur.<sup>10</sup> Among other poets Sankaran Nampidi, the famous bhakta poet of Guruvayur, identifies Vazhakunnam's oratory with the sweet music of Krishna's flute.<sup>11</sup>

Among the unpublished poems on Vazhakunnam can be cited the following Sanskrit stanza of C. Krishnan Nambudiri:

“गंगातटे शुकव; दुज्वलभाषणस्य  
शृंगे, प्रघुष्यशुभभागवतीकथां, यः  
तुंगे लये निहितवान् निखिलान् जनान् सत्-  
संगे, प्रणौमि कदलीगिरिभूसुरं तम्”<sup>12</sup>

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9. Quoted in Bhaktasiromani (op.cit), initial page.

10. Ibid., p.233.

11. Ibid., pp.234-36.

12. C. Krishnan Nambudiri, Amaravani programme, 11-5-96, A.I.R. Kozhikode.

The usual methods adopted by the veteran saints to propagate Vaishnava Bhakti cult were :

1. Individual mendicants wandering far and wide with devotional songs on their lips and musical instruments in their hands.
2. Composing and reciting prayers seated in holy places and pilgrim centres.
3. Congregational singing of Bhajans having assembled at selected centres.
4. Performing Nagarasankeerthana processions.

Vazhakunnam on his part developed a different method of Bhagavata preaching illustrated with sweet stories. He used this method to cultivate Vaishnava Bhakti cult in general and Krishna Bhakti in particular. Thus Vazhakunnam became the pioneer in the field of the Bhagavata preaching. The magical effect of his speech was such that the people even referred to him as 'Krishnajalaka' (when his step brother Neelakandhan Nambudiri younger to him was famous as 'Indrajalaka'). Vazhakunnam has a unique role in reviving Bhakti movement with Guruvayur as its main centre.

On the whole, Vazhakunnam, was a great scholar in Sanskrit and Malayalam. He has contributed much to the literary treasury of these languages. He made substantial contribution to almost all the branches of literature such as - drama, commentary and poetry. Moreover he is a great propagator of Srimadbhagavatam as also of Indian culture. He has worked much for the national

integrity with his footing on the Indian tradition. He has nursed no aversion to the other communities and he rightly pointed out that the aim of all religions was one and the same - the salvation of mankind. This is evident from his works and his casual remarks during his Bhagavata preachings. So Vazhakunnam deserves a place among the eminent scholars who contributed much to the Indian literature, culture and tradition. But it is a pity that the literary world is not much aware of this great scholar as many of his works are yet to be published. It is not practical to include all his unpublished works in this monograph as they are voluminous. Fortunately all the works of Vazhakunnam are kept in tact, and if published, they will be of great benefit to the lovers of literature. Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri deserves to be recognised at large and to be given a distinctive status, appropriate to his greatness.

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\* Denotes Malayalam books

\*\* Denotes Malayalam era.

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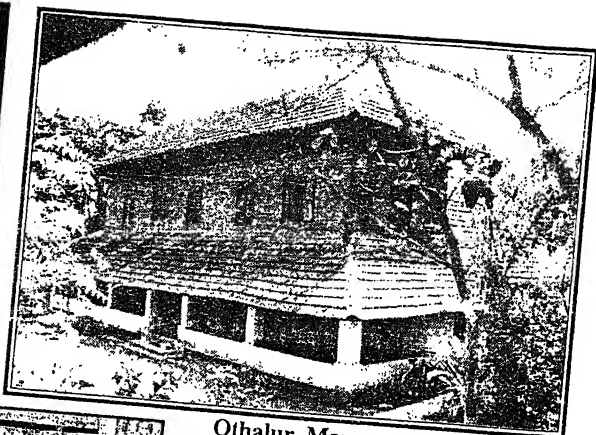
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**Othalur Mana**

**\*\* Late Smt.  
Parvati Antarjanam**



**Paradevata of Othalur Mana**



**Upasanamurthi of Bhaktasiromani**



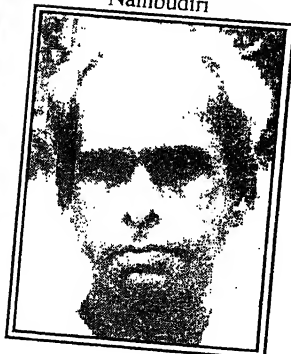
**\* Late Sri  
O. Sankaranarayanan  
Nambudiri**



**\* O. Narayanan Nambudiri**

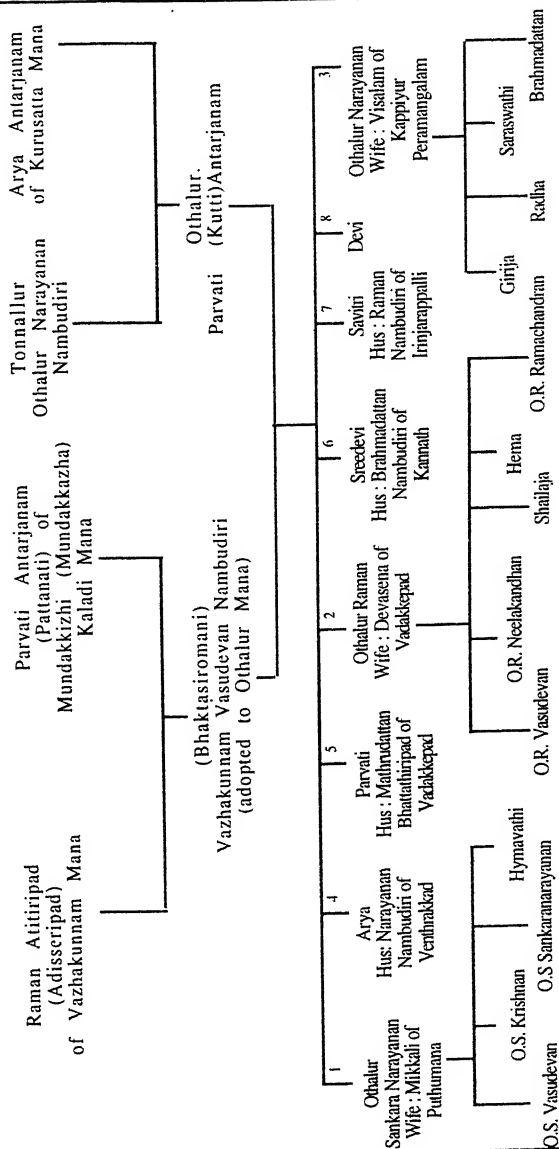


**\* Late Sri O. Raman  
Nambudiri**



**\* Sons of Vazhakunnam  
\*\* Wife of Vazhakunnam**

## \*\* Geneological Chart



\* The numbers represent the order of seniority among the children

\*\* Indebted to Parameswaran Nambudiri of Koythodi Cherumukku Mana, who is closely related to Vazhakunnam Mana.

## APPENDIX II

SPECIMEN HANDWRITING\* (MALAYALAM) OF  
VAZHAKUNNAM VASUDEVAN NAMBUDIRI

[illegible]

\* Taken from the personal manuscript note book of Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiri.